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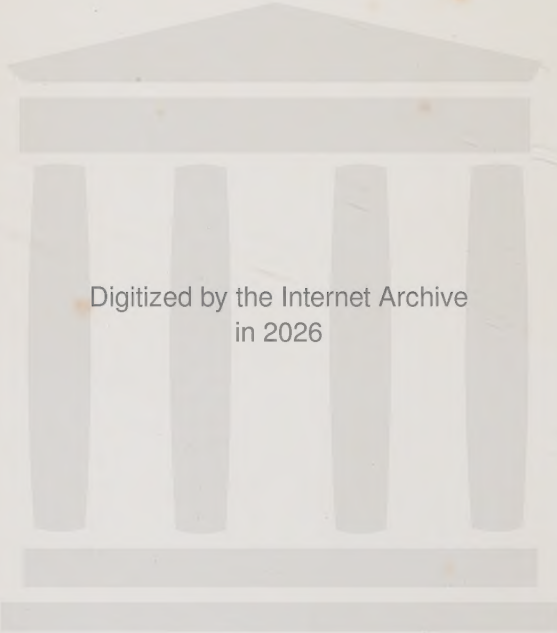
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LECTURES

ON

SHAKSPEARE. 5/1

BY

H. N. HUDSON,

IN TWO VOLUMES.

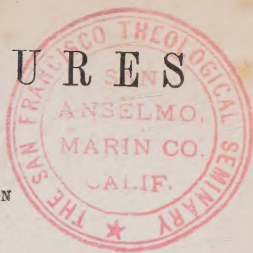
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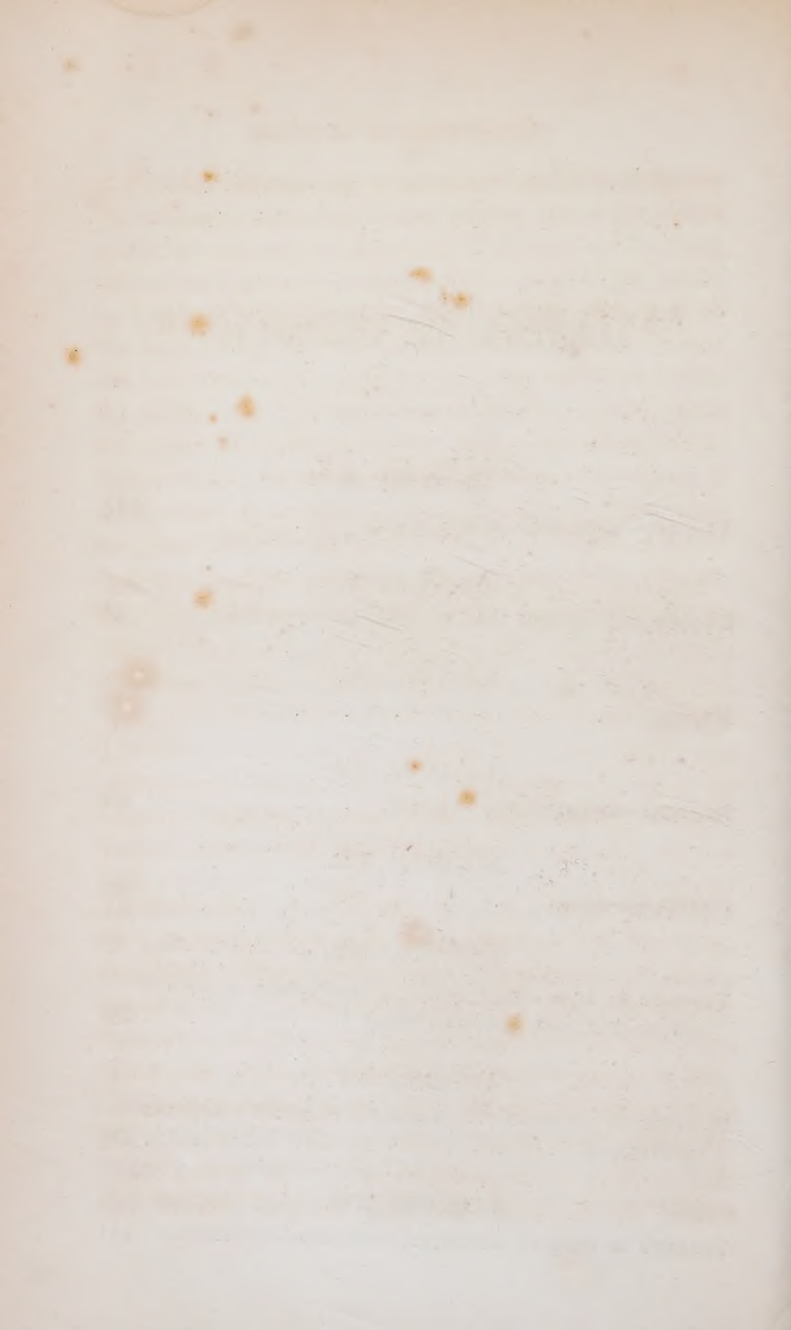
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LECTURES ON SHAKSPEARE.

LECTURE IX.

TEMPEST—MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM.

TEMPEST and Midsummer-Night's Dream are the two plays in which Shakspeare has most daringly and most successfully carried nature beyond herself; his understanding and imagination having here apparently changed places with each other, to the end that the former might employ its energies and resources in building up "a local habitation and a name" for the airy sportive creations of the latter. Both plays exemplify throughout the triumph of essential truth over circumstantial falsehood; the real world undergoing a temporary suspension of its laws as if to celebrate the advent of the ideal, and the understanding cheerfully acquiescing in a sweet contradiction to give freer scope for the beautiful and the pure. The two resemble each other in respect that they proceed in part by the agency of supernatural beings: further than this, however, they have no resemblance whatever; for Shakspeare's supernatural beings are as clearly and distinctly individual in all their features and movements as his most human characters. So perfectly, also, does the poet observe the

distinction between the supernatural and the antinatural, that even when he takes us farthest out of the actual world, we scarcely think or feel that there is any thing but nature about us : indeed we may almost say, that in his hands all the forms of nature become alive, and all the forms of life become natural ; the most airy dream-like conceptions are clothed with the reality of earth, the dullest and heaviest clods of earth informed with the breath of intellectual life. When he creates a new object for our vision, he at the same time creates as it were a new sense within us to perceive it with ; and the sweet fairy visions, with which he enchants us, seem so much a part of ourselves that we can hardly tell, for the time, whether the imaginary is turning out to be real, or the real to be imaginary ; whether the poet is drawing us into an illusion, or waking us out of an illusion ; and whether his creations or ourselves be more truly but

“ Such stuff

As dreams are made of, and whose little life
Is rounded with a sleep.”

Equally ideal in its substance, the *Tempest* is, however, far more actual in its circumstances than *Midsummer-Night's Dream* ; the former transcending, the latter mocking reality ; the one representing human life in an ideal form, where every thing is subject to order and reason, the other representing it as merely a dream, where every thing gives way to fancy and feeling. For evidence of “omnipotent creativeness,” the *Tempest* probably surpasses all the rest of our poet's works. The play unites the two extremes of human imagination ;

for we can scarce conceive a greater diversity in created beings than that between Ariel and Caliban ; the one an ethereal intelligence, the other an intelligent vegetable. Nearly as strong, though of an altogether different sort, is the contrast between Caliban and Miranda ; the former a loathsome embodiment of spiritual deformity, who seems to have been dug up out of the ground, with merely the power of thought ; the latter the embodied quintessence of spiritual beauty, who seems to have dropped down from heaven, with merely human vestments. The moral antithesis between Prospero and Antonio, scarcely less marked than the others, makes up this wonderful dramatic combination,—undoubtedly the most wonderful ever formed : yet all these strangely-assorted characters converge into such unity and harmony of impression, that we cannot see how any one could be what it is without all the others.

Among the many marvellous accounts given to the world by the navigators of the sixteenth century, there was probably none more marvellous than that of the “still-vexed Bermoothes,” now known as the Bermuda Isles. Sir George Somers having been shipwrecked there in a storm, the fruitful imagination of the age pictured them as a land of devils,—“a most prodigious and enchanted place, subject to continual storms and supernatural visitings.” All that was wild and fearful and wonderful in the facts and fictions of the past, was fancied to have made them its chosen dwelling-place. Thither had flocked all the beautiful and terrible visions, all the fairy and fiendish shapes, which advancing civilization had frightened out of the old world. It was there, accordingly, that Shakspeare

sought an earthly whereabout for one of his sweetest and sublimest visions, and the play of Prospero and the Enchanted Isle was the result.

Prospero, duke of Milan, the hero of the play,

“Neglecting worldly ends, all dedicate
To closeness, and the bettering of his mind,”

had intrusted his dukedom to Antonio, a younger brother,

“And to his state grown stranger, being transported
And rapt in secret studies.”

Avarice and ambition having usurped the heart of Antonio, and the king of Naples having been bribed by a stipulation of tribute into a partnership of crime, Prospero was driven from his inheritance, and abandoned to the mercy of the sea, when he floated to the forementioned islands, having no company but his household furniture, his favourite books, and his infant daughter. He there found no traces of human existence save a deformed hag-born monster, the offspring of a foul witch, who,

“For mischiefs manifold, and sorceries terrible
To enter human hearing,”

was banished thither, and “who, with age and envy, was grown into a hoop.” He there passed twelve years pursuing his favourite studies and instructing his beloved child. Deeming his “library dukedom large enough,” he only exchanged his political for an ampler dowry of spiritual prerogatives ; his virtue and intelligence giving

him command over the supernatural beings of the place, and through these over the powers of nature, so that he can compass his designs with the quickness and precision of thought ; control the elements, and make the wind and sea obey him. By the help of this his "so potent art," he at length in an auspicious hour gets his former enemies and persecutors into his hands.

The king of Naples and his entire court, it seems, are on a voyage to attend "the marriage of the king's fair daughter Claribel to the king of Tunis." Made aware by his prescience of what is going on in those remote quarters, Prospero takes advantage of their return to raise a terrible storm at sea, whereby the fleet is dispersed, and the ship containing the king, the crown prince, and the chief counsellors of the throne, is separated from the others. The play opens with the wreck of the ship wherein they are embarked on the shore of his spirit-peopled wilderness. Dispersed in troops about the isle, each supposing the others to be lost, they give way to lamentation and despair ; the king mourns his drowned son, the prince his drowned father ; while some of the sailors drown their troubles in bottled comfort, and in wine-inspired anticipations of island sovereignty. Meanwhile Prospero, having through pity and sorrow wrought the prince and his daughter into a proper state for receiving the most tender impressions, contrives to bring them together, and to this end gives orders to Ariel, his chief minister, to get up some aerial music, whereby Ferdinand is led immediately into Miranda's presence. Every thing falls out just as the old man would have it : "at the first sight they have changed eyes ;"—"they are both in either's powers ;" so that he

has nothing further to do but to "make the swift business uneasy, lest too light winning make the prize light." To try and prove their affection, he imposes the ugliest and heaviest tasks upon the prince, wherein he delights for her sake, and she suffers for his; her presence "makes his labours pleasures," and she "weeps when she sees him work;" thus proving it a "fair encounter of two most rare affections." Through his magic arts and airy ministers, which, however, he employs only for just and beneficent purposes, Prospero has a secret power not only over the bodies and senses, but over the thoughts of his enemies; can put them asleep or keep them awake; can lead them about at will, and reveal his thoughts to them without revealing himself; can paralyze their physical energies, and wring their hearts with remembrances of guilt, or steep their sorrows in forgetfulness: he has but to speak a word or wave his stick, and their "spirits, as in a dream are all bound up;"

" His high charms work,
And these, his enemies, are all knit up
In their distractions."

Master of surrounding agencies, he can of course present occasions suited alike to the good and to the bad inclinations of those in his power; which mastery he so uses as to discover the evil propensities and at the same time thwart the evil purposes of his enemies; manages in such a way as to awaken in some of them the wicked resolve and yet prevent the wicked deed, thus mocking their guilty hopes, and making them the dupes and victims of their own impotent malice. Having by these means saved the king from the blow of a conspiracy

hatched in his sleep, and having awakened in them remorse and penitence for their treachery and violence to himself, he at last brings them all together, and, abjuring his magic arts, returns along with them to his home and inheritance.

PROSPERO.

PROSPERO, it seems to me, is one of the noblest, grandest conceptions that ever entered into the mind of man. So awful yet so gentle, we may truly say of him,

“He sits ’mongst men like a descended god :
He hath a kind of honour sets him off,
More than a mortal seeming.”

A princely hermit equally vast in mind and pure in heart, whatever might be repulsive in the magician is softened and made attractive by the feelings of the father, who “does nothing but in care of her ; of her, his dear one, her, his daughter.” For this cause, being as wise as fond, he has hitherto kept her ignorant of what she is, and whence he is ; for this cause, now that the time has come, he opens to her the history of his life, and melts her filial heart with the story of his wrongs and sufferings while informing her of her noble birth and ancestry, that the feelings of the woman may sweetly blend and coalesce in her mind with the ideas of rank and dignity. Being about to act the part, as it were, of a subordinate providence, to appear clothed with superhuman might and majesty, it was fitting he should come before us at first absorbed in the tenderest and sacredest of human ties. Our human sympathies

being in the outset thus deeply interested for him as a man, awe of his magical and mysterious character then comes in to strengthen, not preclude, those sympathies; he seems as much akin to us in affections as he is superior to us in gifts and counsels: so that in him our nature appears perfected, not perverted; glorified, not falsified; the truer to itself for being raised above itself; like the dawning of a future life before the setting of the present.

Prospero is as supernatural morally and intellectually as Ariel and his fellow-spirits are complexionally; only the former has become supernatural, the latter were made so.—Wisdom has always been able to work results which ignorance could only attribute to enchantment; and supernatural is but the word whereby men designate any thing which transcends their ordinary perceptions and experiences of nature. To be wise and good, is to be powerful, because wisdom and goodness consist in sympathy and harmony with truth and nature; which are mighty and will prevail,—prevail, by using those who hate and oppose them, by serving those who love and obey them: if we fall out with them, they are our masters; if we fall in with them, they are our ministers: the human mind may wield, it cannot resist their power: in a word, they will always be on his side who truly sides with them: we know not what they would do for us, if we really understood them; and to be able to command them, we must first be one with them, must study ourselves into them, or study them into ourselves. Such appears to be the poet's idea in the character and movements of Prospero, whose sorcery is the sorcery of knowledge, whose

magic is the magic of virtue ; all things are aidant and obedient to his wise forethought and his upright will. By his science and art he derives from nature the means of controlling nature ; dresses himself in her might, arms himself with her laws : in his presence, to his eye, she discovers new powers, reveals new secrets, works new results ; her elements, the air in Ariel, the earth in Calaban, become instinct with his intelligent life, pliant to his rational will ; the limbs and organs, as it were, of his body, to express his thoughts and execute his intents. Thus from being the student of nature he becomes, so to speak, her teacher and guide ; she lends him hands because he lends her eyes ; she submits to his authority and follows his instructions, because she can thereby attain to a higher development and a more excellent form.

So that the miracle which Prospero is, in a manner sanctions and authenticates to our minds the miracles which he does : the improbability of his proceedings disappears in his exaltation of character ; he makes us credit his superhuman power by making us feel his superhuman wisdom and goodness. He seems, indeed, a sort of human divinity, whose thoughts and aims are so identical with truth and right, that they may be safely allowed to execute themselves ; whose virtues and sufferings entitle him in the eyes of gods and men to the command of the winds and seas, until he shall have triumphed *in* his enemies, not over them, and recovered his stolen rights *with* them, not from them. In a word, knowledge with him becomes power, because with knowledge he unites the virtue to overcome evil with good ; would scorn to enforce one law by violating another, or to take from others the power without taking

from them the spirit and will to injure or wrong him. Accordingly, in all his plans and purposes, he seeks to restore himself by first reforming his enemies ; to conquer them by calling up an advocate within them ; to disarm their hands by subduing their hearts ; to regain their allegiance by evincing his worth ; and to secure himself from the suffering by saving them from the doing of injustice : true to the part of a subordinate providence, if he inflicts pain upon the guilty, it is for their good ; if he leads them into temptation, it is as a discipline of virtue ; if by ministering opportunities he provokes in them resolutions, and then takes away the performance of crime, it is to bring them to a knowledge of themselves, and to scourge the evil principles out of them : and in the dreadful sights and sounds which harrow up their consciences, he but mirrors and echoes back to them the aspect and utterance of their own souls. Thus, granting him to be what he is, it stands to reason, at least it does not stand against reason, that he should do what he does ; the mind acquiesces, that a partial sovereignty of the elements should be lent to one so worthy to use it, and so incapable of abusing it. But to show that he deserves to wield such powers, he must resign them as soon as he ceases to need them ; should he refuse to do so, he would violate the very law by which he holds them : it was his right to them indeed, that charmed them into his hands ; but the right of course cannot outlive the need from which it sprung ; so that, if it were possible for him to keep or wish them longer, it had been impossible for him ever to get them.

Thus the whole play transports us into the region of the moral and imaginative reason : the polity of the

material world is not so much crossed as educated up into the higher polity of the moral world ; and the supernatural, thought-executing ministers are but the powers and elements of nature, endowed with individual life and intelligence, the poetical or dramatic representatives of the physical supremacy which waits upon spiritual rectitude and wisdom. Violently driven from his possessions, and providentially carried, he and his crying infant, to a lonely island, where dwells "an ampler ether, a diviner air," the hero there undergoes the discipline which, giving him first the mastery of himself, then over nature, fits and enables him to recover his rights. The beings which he afterwards employs are fitly represented as existing before his arrival : but at his coming they were in a state of endless war and confusion ; the better in subjection to the worse ; acting without law, because in the absence of man they had no end to work for ; incapable of order and peace save in a common subordination to a better nature. By his science and art he tames and subdues them, makes them intelligent and serviceable, turns their insane gabbling to speech, their savage howling to music. But, to rise above nature, he must own and cherish, not renounce her ; to produce the flower he must feed and foster the root : disbranched from the maternal sap and circulation of humanity, he would wither and die : it is by working for another, not for himself, by acting as a father, not as an individual merely, that he is to become wise and powerful ; for what, done for himself, had dwarfed and darkened his powers, being done for his child, exalts and ennobles them. Accordingly he lets us know that it is the affections of the man that have invested him with

the prerogatives of an angel ; that it is the feelings and motives of nature that have prompted his supernatural attainments and inspired his supernatural virtues :

“ O ! a cherubim
Thou wast, that did preserve me ! Thou didst smile,
Infused with a fortitude from heaven,
When I have decked the sea with drops full salt ;
Under my burden groaned ; which raised in me
An undergoing stomach, to bear up
Against what should ensue.”

Perhaps there is no dialogue in Shakspeare more finely characteristic and appropriate than the first scene between Prospero and his daughter. Coleridge pronounces the old man's discourse the finest example, he remembers, of retrospective narration, for the purpose of exciting immediate interest, and of giving all the information necessary for the understanding of the plot. With how much more grammatical accuracy, and how much less truth to the character and the occasion, an inferior writer, like Dryden, would have conducted the narrative, is almost too obvious for conjecture. Doubtless we should have had the gray-haired magician delivering himself in set phrase with all the studied regularity and correctness of a prize poem. But how much wealth of thought and feeling would have been lost ! The confusion of language rising from the speaker's affluence of thought ; the zig-zag discourse, always progressing, yet often returning upon itself ; the careless utterance, as if his mind were abstracted from the subject by the pressure of coming events ; and his frequent calling of her attention to what he is saying, because he

is not attending to it himself ; all go to evince the conflux of thoughts and emotions which the crisis would naturally produce in such a mind. It seems as if the past, the present, and the future were all rushing together, and each contending for the mastery in his thoughts ; his noble old heart the while taking advantage of his mental distraction to throw out its jets and gushes of paternal tenderness. He here speaks simply as a man prompted by the natural feelings of a man ; but in the exercise of his mighty charms and in his intercourse with the ministering spirits, he seems to have acquired a new set of ideas and a new language. And he has as many different styles of speech as he has different beings to speak to ; his discourse, though it everywhere “ tastes of the subtleties of the Isle,” being now of a majestic playfulness, now of a solemn grandeur, now of a fantastical and unearthly remoteness, according to the occasion wherein, and the being to whom he is speaking. Perhaps the following is his most characteristic effusion, where the magnificent symphony of the thoughts and the many-sounding rhythm of the verse almost make belief take hold of us in the effects described :—

“ Ye elves of hills, brooks, standing lakes, and groves ;
And ye, that on the sands with printless foot,
Do chase the ebbing Neptune, and do fly him
When he comes back ; you demy-puppets, that
By moonshine do the green-sour ringlets make,
Whereof the ewe not bites ; and you, whose pastime
Is to make midnight mushrooms ; that rejoice
To hear the solemn curfew ; by whose aid,
(Weak masters though you be,) I have bedimmed
The noon-tide sun, called forth the mutinous winds,

And 'twixt the green sea and the azured vault
Set roaring war : to the dread rattling thunder
Have I given fire, and rifted Jove's stout oak
With his own bolt : the strong-based promontory
Have I made shake ; and by the spurs plucked up
The pine and cedar : graves at my command,
Have waked their sleepers ; oped, and let them forth,
By my so potent art : But this rough magic
I here abjure : and, when I have required
Some heavenly music, (which even now I do,)
To work mine end upon their senses, that
This airy charm is for, I'll break my staff,
Bury it certain fathoms in the earth,
And, deeper than did ever plummet sound,
I'll drown my book."

ARIEL.

ARIEL, "delicate Ariel," the "tricksy spirit," has the ubiquity and multiformity of the substance indicated by his name. Yet he is by no means a mere allegorical personification, but a being individually determined. Figure to yourselves a piece of organized air, informed with a feeling soul and an intelligent will, and you have, as nearly as can be given, an image of this unique, amiable, and indescribable personage. I say person, for he engages not merely our curiosity but our sensibility ; we follow him not merely with an intellectual interest, as a mathematical diagram, but with a sympathetic interest, as a fellow being ; exempt, indeed, from such wants and restraints, yet subject to like wrongs and sufferings as ourselves. Like Faery Puck of *Midsummer-Night's Dream*, Ariel moves with the quickness of thought ; sent on an errand,

“He drinks the air before him, and returns
Or ere the pulse twice beat :”

cleaves to the thoughts of his master, and is ready

“To answer his best pleasure ; be’t to fly,
To swim, to dive into the fire, to ride
On the curled clouds :”

nor does he even think it much,

“To tread the ooze of the salt deep ;
To run upon the sharp wind of the North ;
To do him business in the veins of the earth,
When it is baked with frost.”

Unlike Puck, however, he has a sympathy for human distress,—“a touch, a feeling of men’s afflictions,” and a lively sense of right and good, so that he performs Prospero’s behests from moral as well as prudential regards ; is full of gratitude and affection towards his noble master, to whose beneficent art he owes his ability to serve him ; he having been released thereby from the tortures and confinement wherein his former wicked mistress had left him,

“For that he was a spirit too delicate
To act her earthy and abhorred commands.”

Filled with reverence and loyalty towards his wise benefactor, he always salutes him with the most respectful courtesy ; does all his spiriting gently and with hearty good will, executing his orders with infinite zeal and fidelity, as if he served purely for love and duty, not for pay. And he is withal a very merry little person, not

at all inflated with spiritual pride, who thinks it no sin to have a little fun, provided it hurt nobody :—

“ Where the bee sucks there suck I ;
 In a cowslip’s bell I lie :
 There I couch when owls do cry.
 On the bat’s back I do fly,
 After summer, merrily :
 Merrily, merrily shall I live now,
 Under the blossom that hangs on the bough.”

But, though fond of sport, there is nothing wanton or malicious in his mirth ;

“ His manners are more gentle-kind, than of
 Our human generation you shall find
 Many, nay, almost any :”

so serious and humane is his disposition, that we can hardly conceive of his making sport of human infirmity, or of his plaguing and distressing men, like that “ shrewd and knavish sprite” Robin Goodfellow, that he may have the fun of seeing “ what fools these mortals be :” and his nearest approach to a delighting in another’s pain, is his humorous account of the tricks whereby he defeated the “ foul conspiracy of the beast Caliban and his confederates” against his master’s life :—

“ I told you, sir, they were red-hot with drinking ;
 So full of valour, that they smote the air
 For breathing in their faces ; beat the ground
 For kissing of their feet : yet always bending
 Towards their project : then I beat my tabor,
 At which, like unbacked colts, they pricked their ears,
 Advanced their eyelids, lifted up their noses,
 As they smelt music ; so I charmed their ears,

That, calf-like, they my lowing followed, through
 Toothed briers, sharp furzes, pricking goss, and thorns,
 Which entered their frail shins : at last I left them
 I' the filthy mantled pool beyond your cell,
 There dancing up to the chin."

Under his administration, even to the hag-born half-souled Caliban,

" The Isle is full of noises,
 Sounds and sweet airs, that give delight and hurt not.
 Sometimes a thousand twanging instruments
 Will hum about his ears ; and sometimes voices,
 That if he then had waked after long sleep,
 Would make him sleep again."

Indeed, he is a marvellous sweet singer, and gives forth several songs which echo the very music of thought, as if an angel had sung them improvisatore ; an arrant little epicure, in short, of twilight, perfume, moonbeams, and sweet sounds. But, though so sweetly, so enchantingly melodious, he can tune his voice to the awfulest notes of remorse and despair, can tear open the seared-up conscience of guilt, and wring the soul with agonizing fears :—

" Methought the billows spoke, and told me of it ;
 The winds did sing it to me ; and the thunder,
 That deep and dreadful organ-pipe, pronounced
 The name of Prosper ; it did bass my trespass ;"

such is the effect of his music upon the guilty king : but to the unoffending, blameless prince,—

" Sitting on a bank,
 Weeping again the king my father's wreck,

This music crept by me upon the waters •
Allaying both their fury, and my passion,
With its sweet air."

On the whole, we do not wonder, that Prospero loves the "dainty Ariel," and could be content to finish his days there but for his divine daughter, "a thread of his own life, or that for which he lives."

CALIBAN.

CALIBAN is among the standing wonders of Shakspear's genius. At once the antithesis and the supplement of the zephyr-like Ariel, Caliban has all the sense that the other wants, and wants all the soul that the other has: he is as supernatural a being as Ariel, though supernatural in the opposite direction; as if the material and spiritual elements of nature, instead of combining into a human being, had for once departed from the usual order, and shaped themselves into separate forms of life. All the finer elements of the place having been drawn off to fashion the exquisite soul of Ariel, Caliban, as his name imports, is altogether of the earth, earthy; as in the one we have, as it were, the topmost sparkling foam, so in the other we have merely the organized sediment and dregs of humanity. Yet both represent, after a sort, actual classes of men, though with bodies far more appropriate to and expressive of their dispositions than nature ever produces: for, were all men featured as they are minded; their bodies so made as to express, not conceal, their characters: were deformity of soul always accompanied with corresponding ugliness of

person, we should either live in perpetual fright, or become incapable of fear : either the beauty of the good and the deformity of the bad would be mutually terrific and intolerable, or both would wax hard and insensible to all differences. It is worthy of note, that all the sportive mirthfulness of our nature is concentrated in Ariel, while Caliban is at once too muddy-souled to produce and too muddy-faced to express the sunshine of a smile : such is the malignity of his nature, that its proper music is to curse, its proper laughter is to rail. A mere human understanding without the reason or the moral sense, organized into an appropriate form ; very much such a being as we might suppose the connecting link between man and brute would be, Caliban can use with tolerable skill the proper means, but cannot conceive the proper ends of human existence ; has faculties corresponding to the material, but not to the moral world ; can observe, compare, remember and classify facts, but has no emotions or perceptions of truth, or right, or beauty, or goodness ; can apprehend the utility, but not the sacredness of justice, the rules, but not the principles of morality ; is capable of knowledge, but not of wisdom, of prudence, but not of virtue, of rest, but not of peace, of regret, but not of remorse. Without any original ideas or innate sense of folly and wisdom, virtue and vice, of course a drunken sailor and the noble Prospero are just the same to him in themselves ; and he learns to distinguish and choose between them only by experience of what they can do for him : accordingly, after experiencing the meanness and impotence of the one, he is glad enough to return to the service of the other.

Yet this strange, uncouth, malignant, yet marvellously

life-like confusion of natures, part man, part demon, part brute, Prospero by his wonderful art and science has educated into a sort of poet. Instruction, however, has in no wise tamed, it has rather increased his radical malignity and crookedness of disposition: a slave "whom stripes may move, not kindness;" "who any print of goodness will not take;" and "on whose nature nurture can never stick;"

"his vile race,
Though he did learn, had that in't which good natures
Could not abide to be with;"

and his chief profit of language is that "he knows how to curse" his teacher: even his poetry is made up of the fascinations of ugliness; a sort of inverted beauty; the poetry of dissonance and deformity. The dawnings of understanding in him, as in some animals and perhaps in some men, take the form of vicious propensities and vile cunning, so that he evinces his humanity chiefly by openness to its vices, and a readiness to become the foot-licker of whoever will feed his beastly appetites: the only celestial thing that he knows of, is the liquor that makes him drunk; his only god the man that gives it to him. Schlegel finely compares his mind to a dark cave, into which the light of knowledge falling neither illuminates nor warms it, but only serves to set in motion the poisonous vapours; wherein I probably need not say how numerous a kindred he seems to have in the human family. Before the instructions of Prospero, even his understanding was buried beneath his earthy grossness; for the mere understanding, disjoined from the supplementary powers of reason and conscience, has no spon-

taneous activity, can only be moved to action from without, and by one in whom those supplementary powers are awake and supreme. Perhaps the hero's greatest miracle is, that he "extracts sunbeams from this cucumber," teaching him how

"To name the bigger light, and how the less,
That burn by day and night :"—

"I pitied thee,
Took pains to make thee speak, taught thee each hour
One thing or other ; when thou didst not, savage,
Know thy own meaning, but wouldst gabble like
A thing most brutish, I endowed thy purposes
With words to make them known."

Of course it is only by exhausting the resources of instruction on such a being that his innate and essential deficiency can be fairly shown : we cannot see what he wants until he develope all that he has. So that Prospero's having educated him into a sort of poet, without eliciting any sparks of genuine humanity, is the best possible proof what he is. That he has not the germs of a human soul, is equally evident from what education has done, and from what it has not done for him ; so that I know not whether it be more wonderful, that Prospero should have made so much, as that he should have made no more out of him. High culture might indeed develope understanding in such a being, without the aid of human feelings, but it could not develope those feelings, because nature has not planted the seeds of them there. The magical world of spirits, it is true, has cast into the dark caverns of his brain a faint reflection of a better world ; yet it is only in his dreaming, when sleep has in a manner relaxed the

“muddy vesture of decay,” which doth so “grossly close him in,” that

- “The clouds, methought, would open, and show riches
Ready to drop upon me ; that, when I waked,
I cried to dream again.”

In his waking moments all his thoughts, words, and images, though poetical in their way, seem, like his nature, to have been dug up out of the ground. It is as if human speech and understanding were given to a baboon, and the utmost power of culture brought to bear upon him ; so that his poetry exemplifies at once the triumph of art over nature, and the triumph of nature over art.

FERDINAND AND MIRANDA.

IN Ferdinand and Miranda is concentrated whatever is sweet, noble and beautiful in human nature ; all their sweetness, nobility, and beauty of nature at the first sight centring and reposing upon each other. Their courtship is the very poetry and religion of love : so inexpressibly delicate, tender and pure, it seems a stray melody caught up and rescued from the broken bowers of Eden ; is like one of those things which we dream of in the “sweet holiness of youth,” or rather, which we seem to remember as a part of the heaven whence we came, but which we awake only to sigh and deplore the absence of, until, perhaps, our feelings are frozen at their marvellous source by the icy breath of a worldly life. It is very apt to remind one of the courtship of Florizell and Perdita, though more, I suspect, by contrast than by

resemblance. So like, and yet so different, it is hardly possible to say which is the best; or rather, it always seems impossible not to like that best which one read last; and we can weary of either only when the fountains of love are all buried or dried up within us. That of Florizell and Perdita unites in perfection the princely and the pastoral, the graceful dignity of the palace with the breathing freshness of the field: it is indeed perfect nature, but is something more; is made up of purity and affection, but these are coloured though not obscured by unessential elements. That of Ferdinand and Miranda is not only perfect nature, but is nothing but nature; is without a single foreign element or unessential tinge: it has neither the perfume of the court, nor the fragrance of the garden, but the simple, unmixed sweetness of nature, if, indeed, I ought not rather to say, of heaven. In the one, we have the love of a prince and a shepherdess, both deeply conscious what and where they are; in the other, simply the love of two lovers, both entirely forgetting themselves and their whereabouts in their simultaneous mutual inspiration. In short, there is a paradisaical primitiveness in the courtship of Ferdinand and Miranda, such as is probably to be found in no other representation of love ever given. It is as if the enchanted Isle were Eden, Ferdinand and Miranda, Adam and Eve. At first they look upon each other with perfect wonder, each esteeming the other something too divine for human love; to her he seems a spirit, to him she seems a goddess of the Isle; and their mutual wonder becomes mutual worship as fast as ignorance gives place to knowledge. Never, assuredly, was the perfect contentedness, the entire satisfac-

tion of love with its object so finely represented : no sooner do they see each other, than they set up their rest, neither of them having the heart to look any further, to wish any thing better : in a word, they are to each other emphatically enough ; being framed by nature in that “ due and sweet proportion ” wherein, saith the divine Hooker, “ doth lie the reason why that kind of love which is the perfectest ground of wedlock is seldom able to yield any reason of itself.” When to try her love, her father tells her,

“ To the most of men this is a Caliban,
And they to him are angels ;”

she can only answer,

“ My affections
Are then most humble ; I have no ambition
To see a goodlier man :”

and on the other side,

“ My father’s loss, the weakness that I feel,
The wreck of all my friends, or this man’s threats,
To whom I am subdued, are but light to me,
Might I but through my prison once a day
Behold this maid.”

It is hardly possible to conceive any thing more religiously disinterested than the feelings with which these innocent creatures regard each other ; yet we cannot say, nor do we feel, that there is any idolatry, any excess in their love.

MIRAN.

“ Alas, now, pray you,
Work not so hard : I would, the lightning had
Burnt up those logs that you are enjoined to pile !

Pray, set it down, and rest you : when this burns,
 'T will weep for having wearied you : my father
 Is hard at study ; pray now, rest yourself ;
 He's safe for these three hours.

FERD. O most dear mistress,
 The sun will set, before I shall discharge
 What I must strive to do.

MIRAN. If you'll sit down,
 I'll bear your logs the while : Pray give me that ;
 I'll carry it to the pile.

FERD. No, precious creature :
 I'd rather crack my sinews, break my back,
 Than you should such dishonour undergo,
 While I sit lazy by.

MIRAN. It would become me
 As well as it does you : and I should do it
 With much more ease, for my good will is to it,
 And yours it is against.—You look wearily.

FERD. No, noble mistress ; 'tis fresh morning with me,
 When you are by at night. I do beseech you,
 (Chiefly that I may set it in my prayers,)
 What is your name ?

MIRAN. Miranda :—O my father,
 I have broke your hest to say so.

FERD. Admired Miranda !
 Indeed, the top of admiration ; worth
 What's dearest to the world ! Full many a lady
 I have eyed with best regard ; and many a time
 The harmony of their tongues hath into bondage
 Brought my too diligent ear : for several virtues
 Have I liked several women ; never any
 With so full soul, but some defect in her
 Did quarrel with the noblest grace she owed,
 And put it to the foil : But you, O you,
 So perfect, and so peerless, are created
 Of every creature's best.

MIRAN. I do not know
 One of my sex ; no woman's face remember,

Save from my glass, mine own ; nor have I seen
 More that I may call men, than you, good friend,
 And my dear father : how features are abroad,
 I am skilless of ; but, by my modesty,
 (The jewel in my dower,) I would not wish
 Any companion in the world but you ;
 Nor can imagination form a shape,
 Besides yourself, to like of.—

FERD. Hear my soul speak ;—

The very instant that I saw you, did
 My heart fly to your service ; there resides,
 To make me slave to it ; and for your sake
 Am I this patient log-man.

MIRAN. Do you love me ?

FERD. O heaven, O earth, bear witness to this sound,
 And crown what I profess with kind event,
 If I speak true ; if hollowly, invert
 What best is boded me to mischief ! I,
 Beyond all limit of what else i' the world,
 Do love, prize, honour you.

MIRAN. I am a fool

To weep at what I am glad of.

FERD. Wherefore weep you ?

MIRAN. At mine unworthiness, that dare not offer
 What I desire to give ; and much less take,
 What I shall die to want : But this is trifling ;
 And all the more it seeks to hide itself,
 The bigger bulk it shows. Hence, bashful cunning !
 And prompt me, plain and holy innocence !
 I am your wife, if you will marry me ;
 If not, I'll die your maid : to be your fellow,
 You may deny me ; but I'll be your servant,
 Whether you will or no.

FERD. My mistress, dearest,
 And I thus humble ever.

MIRAN. My husband then ?

FERD. Ay, with a heart as willing
 As bondage e'er of freedom.

People may indeed quarrel with the magic of Prospero, but surely no one that has a soul will question either the magic or the divinity of these lines. Yet some appear to think that Shakspeare, irreligious himself, could not delineate or conceive truly religious characters; probably because his persons do not take sides on the "quinquarticular controversy;" their faith always showing itself in works, not in words, and their piety consisting in doing right, not in "getting religion." That Miranda, though the soul of filial affection, should be so innocently and insensibly drawn into something of disobedience to her father's command, as Coleridge remarks, finely illustrates the workings of an innate tendency corresponding to the Scripture precept; *she shall forsake father and mother, and cleave unto her husband.*

Of the characters of Ferdinand and Miranda, perhaps the less there is said the better. We have comparatively little, indeed, from Ferdinand, but in that little how much! He has nearly all the conceivable excellencies of manly youth, but in the promise rather than in the performance, the bud rather than the blossom; we almost see his rich generous nature developing itself before us. Full of truth, tenderness, and honour, "gentle, and not fearful," he seems waiting but for just such an inspiration as Miranda to unfold whatever is noble and divine in human nature: we do not wonder at her saying as she eyes his "brave form" and "goodly person,"

"I might call him

A thing divine; for nothing natural

I ever saw so noble;"

and we are as little surprised that his big, manly heart,

being melted into tenderness by his sorrows and sufferings, should put forth all its treasures as he stands gazing at the heavenly apparition before him. The fact that the sight of her converts him into a hero, and that his heroism bursts forth in spontaneous homage to her loveliness, is alone sufficient to prove him worthy of her.

The impression which Miranda makes upon us is very much like that of every other noble woman, except that it contains whatever is most divine, and nothing but what is most divine in all other women. She is not, like Perdita, at once the queen of flowers, and the flower of queens, but simply the queen and the flower of women ; is made up of the very bloom and perfume of womanhood. To say she is true, gentle, innocent, and modest, seems injustice to her ; she is truth, gentleness, innocence, and modesty themselves. The mere child of Prospero and nature, she has never known a single individual of her own sex, and but one and a half of the other sex. "In the dark backward and abysm of time," she can remember no instructions but her father's ; and under his instructions all the simple and original elements of her being, love, light, grace, honour, and innocence, all pure feelings and tender sympathies, whatever is sweet, gentle and holy in womanhood, seem to have sprung up in her nature as from celestial seed. An air of inexpressible purity overspreads her whole being : she seems utterly incapable of a single thought or emotion that can be associated with an ugly or ungentle idea : meek and bold, her heart freely suffers with those that she sees suffer ; and, in the sweet religious tremblings of her virgin soul, is as confiding as she is

worthy of confidence. Her father's mighty magic seems to have charmed away all unwholesome and unholy influences, or Caliban to have sponged them up as more congenial to his nature : the contagion of the world's slow stain has not visited her ; the chills and cankers of social advantages and artificial wisdom have not touched nor come near her : while all the sweetest and sacredest influences of creation seem to have flocked around her, to have been charmed into her presence, as if to do her homage and renew their efficacy. Even her father's former condition and sufferings have been carefully hidden from her ; she knows but that he is her father, and " master of a full poor cell ;" " more to know did never meddle with her thoughts." To their enchanted Isle heaven has suffered nothing to come but tidings of truth, and love, and joy ; these she has drunk in from earth and sky ; from her infancy she has breathed them in the atmosphere and heard them in the aerial melodies of the place ; " old Ocean, that mighty harmonist," has sung them to her :—

" The floating clouds their state have lent
To her ; for her the willow bent ;
Nor hath she failed to see
Even in the motions of the storm
Grace that did mould the maiden's form
By silent sympathy.

The stars of midnight have been dear
To her ; and she hath leaned her ear
In many a secret place,
Where rivulets dance their wayward round,
And beauty born of murmuring sound
Hath passed into the face."

But is not this an altogether ideal and impracticable representation both of human character and human condition? Undoubtedly it is; but it is far more natural, in the right sense of the word, than any thing we find in actual life: for man was natural before the fall; he has been altogether unnatural ever since. The truth is, Miranda is an unfallen woman, more exquisitely delineated even than Milton's Eve before the fall. Ignorant of sin, she is also innocent of it; for our first parents learnt sin of the devil; their posterity seem to have learnt it of each other; and Miranda has had none to teach it her. Having nothing within to impel her down, nor any thing without to draw her down, her character is but the proper result of her nature and her condition.

GONZALO.

THE honest old Lord Gonzalo, the former friend and benefactor of Prospero,—“the dear old man, the gray-haired man of glee,”—sits amongst his wicked companions like a diamond set in pitch. “As blithe a man as we shall see on a spring holiday,” the island is a fit place for him to play with Utopian dreams, (who has not heard of Gonzalo's commonwealth?) and no man, who would play with these at such a time and in such a place, could be bribed to work with any thing but truth. His merry humour amid the shipwreck is a significant contrast to the angry cursings of his associates, showing how much less of sin innocence finds in the world than guilt does. As he is merry in the contemplation of

danger, so they give way to mirth in the plotting and concocting of crime, thus exemplifying the well known propensity of evil minds to seek refuge from the guilt of an intended act, to familiarize and make themselves at home with wicked designs, by turning them into occasions of ridicule and jesting. In their continual scoffing, also, and jeering at "holy Gonzalo, honourable man," is shown the usual tendency of bad men to quiet their uneasy sense of inferiority to the good by making them objects of scorn and contempt.

Of the poetic, as distinguished from the characteristic beauties of this most charming play, I cannot pretend to speak ;—to give them would be to give two-thirds of the whole. All that comes from Prospero, Ariel, Ferdinand and Miranda breathes of nothing but poetry ; in a word, the play has as much of poetry as is compatible with so much of character.

MIDSUMMER-NIGHT'S DREAM.

MIDSUMMER-NIGHT'S DREAM is undoubtedly the greatest poser to criticism in existence. For the name is most accurately descriptive of the thing ; and who shall undertake to pronounce upon a dream, whether this is as it ought to be, or whether that ought to be other than it is ? Besides, literature has nothing else like it ; nothing, therefore, with which we can compare it, or from which we can gather a general test of its merits. For the poet has here exercised powers differing not only in degree, but even in kind from those of any other writer. In his other plays, though creating his characters out

of the ideal, he shaped their whereabouts out of the actual, where imagination has some support from fact: in this the whereabouts is as ideal as the characters, both being alike the creation of the poet's mind; so that imagination has no support but itself. The herb

“ Whose juice on sleeping eyelids laid
Will make a man or woman madly dote
Upon the next live creature that it sees,”

serves to idealize the whole, even to the sunbeams and the soil: it tells us that the vegetation of the place proceeds by enchantment; that there is magic in the germination of the seed and secretion of the sap. To our imagination the poet thus supernaturalizes, or rather unrealizes nature herself, and so brings her into sympathy with the unreal characters and events of the drama. The play, in short, is emphatically a dream, yet a dream filled with realities; not indeed such realities as we can see, or hear, or touch, or taste, but dreamlike realities: it bears much the same relation* to our actual dreams as the poet's other plays bear to our actual experiences; an ideal dream, truer to itself even than our real dreams are; not such a dream as we have, for then we should wish to sleep forever, but such as we might have, or would wish to have.

Contemplating human life merely as a dream, the play of course and with obvious propriety represents every thing as confused, flitting, shadowy and indistinct; without reason, or order, or law; the worlds of fancy and of fact everywhere running together, and interchanging their functions and qualities. In the words of another, “life appears in travestie; the most ill-assorted elements,

the oddest shapes, and events which mock reality, dance and whirl about in the strangest confusion. The whole appears a cheat and delusion, which flits before us without form or substance. At last, however, the heterogeneous elements become assorted ; the strange and wonderful creations vanish and dissolve into the ordinary forms of reality ; order is restored, and out of the tangled web right and reason result."

Strong passion and deep characterization would obviously be out of place in such a performance. It has room for nothing but love, and beauty, and delight ; whatever, in a word, is most poetical and most aerial in nature and in fancy. Accordingly, whatever is so is gathered into it, and whatever is not so is kept out of it ; for Bottom is as much the poetry, the ideal perfection of the grotesque, as Titania is of the beautiful. The characters are appropriately drawn without depth, gravity, completeness or consistency, with a few light, delicate, vanishing touches ; some being dreamy and sentimental, some gay and frolicsome, and others replete with amusing absurdities, while all are equally full of feeling and fancy, conceit and humour. The very scene is laid in a true dreamland, called Athens indeed, but only because Athens was the greatest beehive of beautiful visions then known ; or rather, it lies in an ideal forest near an ideal Athens ; a forest peopled with sportive elves and sprites and fairies, feeding on moonlight and music and fragrance, as if to transport us the more effectually into that wondrous spirit-land from which old Athens drew her divinest inspirations.

A troop of truant lovers, with whom "the course of true love runs not smooth," a part to escape the hand

of parental interdiction, and the rest in jealous pursuit of them, wander off by moonlight into the woodland habitation of Oberon and Titania, king and queen of fairies. Thither also repair at the same time

“A crew of patches, rude mechanicals,
That work for bread upon Athenian stalls,”

to rehearse a “most lamentable comedy” which they are getting up to celebrate the nuptials of their sovereign. It is in the harmonious discord between these persons and the natives of the forest, that the indescribable charm of the play consists.

The tender distresses of unrequited or forsaken love here concern not our moral feelings at all, but only at most our human sympathies ; for love is represented as the effect of some visual enchantment which the king of fairies, through his sovereignty over “the hidden power of herbs, and might of magic spells,” can undo or suspend, reverse or inspire, at pleasure. The lovers all seem creatures of another mould than ourselves, with barely enough of the fragrance of humanity about them to interest our human feelings, and whose deepest sorrow wears upon its face a smile of joy. Here, then, is either sport or work for the fairy nation, according to their several propensities. Oberon, having felt “the inly touch of love,” is moved with pity for the “human mortals” who have strayed into his dominions, and takes immediate measures to relieve their distresses by turning their desires into concurrence with their destiny. For this purpose he gives instructions to Puck, his prime minister, (the same individual that can “put a girdle round about the earth in forty minutes,”) a mad-cap,

mischievous sprite, who has a deal of exquisite fine fun in teasing and vexing such fools as these mortals are, and whose roguish inadventures make things much worse than ever ; and it is not till after much laughable confusion and distraction that the philanthropic fairy by a second effort brings things into order, and links the choice of the distressed lovers in entire complacency with their fate.

A jealous dispute, moreover, having risen between the fairy king and queen,

“ Because that she, as her attendant, hath
A lovely boy, stolen from an Indian king ;
She never had so sweet a changeling :
And jealous Oberon would have the child
Knight of his train, to trace the forests wild :
But she, perforce, withholds the loved boy,
Crowns him with flowers, and makes him all her joy :”—

the king, to cure the obstinacy of his spouse, determines to apply enchantment to her in her sleep. His gentle Puck having brought him the forementioned herb,

“ He'll watch Titania when she is asleep,
And drop the liquor of it in her eyes :
The next thing then she waking looks upon
(Be it on lion, bear, or wolf, or bull,
On meddling monkey, or on busy ape,)
She shall pursue it with the soul of love.
And ere he take this charm from off her sight
(As he can take it with another herb,)
He'll make her render up her page to him.”

Meanwhile Puck in one of his merry pranks having caught Bottom, the stage-manager of the occasion, retiring a little from the company, claps an ass's head upon

him. As might be expected, his return in the new head-dress spreads unutterable amazement and consternation through the theatrical corps, disperses them in all directions, and thus leaves them to the mercy of Puck, who feeds his passion for mischief out of them to satiety ;

“leads them about around,
Through bog, through bush, through brake, through brier ;
Sometimes a horse he'll be, sometimes a hound,
A hog, a headless bear, sometimes a fire ;
And neigh, and bark, and grunt, and roar, and burn,
Like horse, hound, hog, bear, fire, at every turn.”

Bottom finding himself alone, and being overjoyed at his transformation, very naturally gives vent to his feelings in music. His singing wakes Titania from her “flowery bed,” who is straightway so captivated by his song, his “amiable cheeks,” and “fair large ears,” that she loses all regard for the changeling boy. With sweet constraint she forces the “gentle mortal” to stay beside her, and orders a troop of her tiny servants to honour him with their finest services and courtesies ;—

“Be kind and courteous to this gentleman ;
Hop in his walks, and gambol in his eyes ;
Feed him with apricocks and dewberries,
With purple grapes, green figs, and mulberries ;
The honey bags steal from the humble bees,
And, for night tapers, crop their waxen thighs,
And light them at the fiery glow-worm's eyes,
To have my love to bed, and to arise ;
And pluck the wings from painted butterflies,
To fan the moonbeams from his sleeping eyes ;”—

until the king, having effected his purpose, and pitying her dotage, relieves her from her enchantment and Bottom from his metamorphosis. The play winds up with

the return of the wandering lovers cured of all their troubles, the celebration of their nuptials together with those of their duke and his bouncing Amazon, and, to crown all, the exhibition of "the tedious brief play" of young Pyramus and his love Thisbe, "very tragical mirth," which Bottom and company have gotten up with such infinite ado.

With such a consubstantiation of the worlds of fancy and of fact as is here set before us, the critic can do but little. The soul of the play evaporates in the process of criticism, like the fragrance of a flower under a chemical analysis. Such a wildness of strange poetical fascinations, of fanciful dream-land and spirit-land imagery, can be given by none but Shakspeare, and in no language but his. The critic can at best but speak to the understanding; and nothing less than the power to put understanding asleep for imagination to dream, can give a conception of such beings as are here expressed; beings who, for fear,

"Creep into acorn cups, and hide them there;
Who hang a pearl in every cowslip's ear;
Skim milk; and sometimes labour in the quern,
And bootless make the breathless housewife churn;"

and whose office it is,

"Some, to kill cankers in the musk-rose buds;
Some, war with rear-mice for their leathern wings,
To make the small elves coats; and some, keep back
The clamorous owl, that nightly hoots, and wonders
At the quaint spirits."

The whole play, indeed, is pervaded with an indefinable grace, as subtile and impalpable as magnetism; its

charms are as aerial and omnipresent as those of a spring morning: we may see them and feel them, but cannot locate or define them; cannot say they are here, or they are there: stealing upon us, or stealing within us, like some soft celestial witchery, the moment we yield ourselves up to them, they seem to be everywhere; the moment we try to master them, they seem to be nowhere. Whether, therefore, the play will bear the test of criticism or not, the beauty it reveals and the delight it affords are its triumph: at all events it succeeds; if not in accordance with the rules of art, then in spite of them; the sweet bondage into which it carries the mind, raising it above dependence on the examples of others, and attesting its conformity to deeper laws than the criticism, or perhaps the creations, of others have anything to do with.

BOTTOM.

BOTTOM the weaver is undoubtedly the most universal genius Shakspeare has delineated. Indeed, he is the most Protean critic, connoisseur and play-actor we shall anywhere find, to whom throwing the shuttle seems to require all the faculties and include all the arts within the compass of human ability. There is no performance, nor any part of a performance, for which he cannot discover in himself a latent aptitude: the parts of the lover, the tyrant, the lady, and the lion, are alike at his finger's ends; he can personate them all, it seems, rather better than they can personate themselves; and he has the same wonderful versatility of face, of beard,

and of voice, as of mind : in short, he is perfectly up to any thing : if he play the lover, "let the audience look to their eyes ; he will move storms, he will condole in some measure :"—"Yet his chief humour is for a tyrant : he could play Ercles rarely, or a part to tear a cut in, to make all split :"—Nevertheless he can do the lion equally well ; and "will aggravate his voice so, that he will roar you as gently as any sucking dove ; he will roar you an 't were any nightingale :"—And whatever part he takes, "he will discharge it in either your straw-coloured beard, your orange-tawny beard, your purple-ingrain beard, or your French-crown-colour beard, your perfect yellow." And his judicial powers are fully commensurate with his mimetic powers ; he has the same genius for critical appreciation as for stage personation. We should naturally presume, indeed, that a man would understand a thing in proportion as he had studied it ; but herein we are liable to err ; for critic Bottom plainly understands a thing in proportion as he has not studied it : in which respect he has certainly had more imitators of late years than any other great man whose name and fame have reached us.

Bottom's transformation caps the climax of grotesque fanciful drollery. As Schlegel hath ingeniously remarked, it is the translation of a metaphor in its literal sense ; the turning of a figure of speech into visible form. It cannot therefore be painted or represented to the senses at all ; it will bear only to be thought of or imagined. We can endure, at least we often have to endure, that a man should seem an ass to the eye of the mind ; but that he should seem so to the eye of the body is past endurance. Judging according to ideas,

we can recognize the truth of a man in the form of a brute, or of a brute in the form of a man ; but of neither, judging according to sense : for which cause the best attempts to represent Bottom on the stage always have failed, and always must fail. Delightful to think, it is intolerable to look upon : exquisitely true in idea, it has no truth whatever, or even verisimilitude, when reduced to fact ; so that however willingly imagination receives it, sense and understanding revolt at it. The humour of the thing, too, is all lost by translation into visibility ; what was an agreeable illusion passes into an offensive monstrosity ; as we often delight in indulging fancies and giving names, when we should be shocked were our fancies to harden into realities before us. A child, for example, has infinite pleasure in conceiving the stick he rides to be a horse, but would be frightened out of his wits should the stick expand into an actual horse. The truth is, the mind naturally delights in the simple exercise of its own creativeness ; and in such a case as Bottom this exercise is rather suspended than assisted by visible representation. It need hardly be said, that we enjoy visions in our sleep, which would only disgust or terrify us were we awake ; and nothing can be vainer than attempting to make us dream with our eyes wide open, and with the stuff our dreams are made of solidified into things before us.

It is edifying to observe the effect Bottom's transformation has on his character ; for it is not till after this event that his genius in all its strength and originality comes forth. The consciousness of his new shape awakens all the manhood within him. Like many others, caring but little to *be* a man so long as he knows

he seems one, he tries his utmost to be a man as soon as he knows he seems an ass. Of course we all wish to be distinguished from mere animals somehow, but are often content so long as our human shape prevents our being confounded with them. Wherefore, if some of us could undergo a similar transformation, it would probably be the salvation of our minds, if not of our souls. Losing the visible distinction, we should naturally do our best to put forth one of another sort. For we could not bear to be without some evidence that we were men ; a conscious want therefore of the appearance might force us back upon a development of the reality ; make us endeavour our utmost to unfold other proofs and signs of manhood than those on which we are now so apt to rely. Like Bottom, therefore, we should probably acquire all at once a very learned taste and most courtier-like manners ; have "a reasonable good ear in music," though we might prefer "the tongs and the bones ;" and discover a most Epicurean appetite, especially for "dried peas" and "bottled hay."

As might be conjectured, all the human characters in this play, overwearied by their nocturnal adventures, fall asleep ; and, upon awaking, regard their several remembrances as so many visions. It all appears to them, as indeed it is, but "the fierce vexation of a dream ;" as, in our troubled dreams, we sometimes dream that our troubles are hushed in sleep ; nay, dream that we go to sleep on purpose to forget our troubles. It is but natural, therefore, that Bottom, after his singular experiences, should feel "the exposition of sleep" upon him ; and that awaking deeply impressed with the rareness and strangeness of his vision, he should deem the man

but an ass who should go about to expound his dream. "Methought I was,—there is no man can tell what. Methought I was, and methought I had,—but man is but a patched fool, if he will offer to say what methought I had. The eye of man hath not heard, the ear of man hath not seen; man's hand is not able to taste, his tongue to conceive, nor his heart to report, what my dream was."

Bottom's companions, Quince the carpenter, Snug the joiner, Flute the bellows-mender, Snout the tinker, and Starveling the tailor, are exquisitely distinguished from each other; all of them being perfectly individual, with peculiarities derived either from nature or from their callings: for, like their kinsman Slender in *Merry Wives of Windsor*, they are obliged to be original, inasmuch as they have not sufficient force of being for imitation of any sort. Had we Shakspeare's acuteness, we could doubtless trace out their respective vocations from their characters; they having just about strength of nature enough to smell of their shops. Nothing can be more fantastically humorous than the contrast between them and the troop of fairies, Puck, Peasblossom, Cobweb, Moth, and Mustard-seed. They seem mutually attractive even because they are perfect opposites, as if there were a sort of spiritual polarity amongst them.

In the temporary wedlock of Bottom and Titania the two extremes of the grotesque and the beautiful have met together:—

"So doth the woodbine, the sweet honeysuckle,
Gently entwist,—the female ivy so
Enrings the barky fingers of the elm."

This embracing and kissing of the most ludicrous and the most poetical, the enchantment under which they are brought together, and the airy dreamlike grace which hovers over their union, are altogether inimitable and indescribable. The very diversity of the elements seems to link them in the closer affinity; while the same principle that draws them together augments their difference; Titania's passion inspiring her into a finer issue of soul, and at the same time encouraging Bottom into a fuller expression of stomach. Their union is so very unnatural as to seem quite probable: we cannot see how any thing but a dream could possibly have united them; and that they could not have come together save in a dream, is a sort of proof that they *were* dreamed together. And the thing engages very much the same kind of faith as a dream. The strangeness of the effect is irresistible. Too ludicrous for laughter, and too absurd for censure, we may almost say, it makes us weep smiles or smile tears of delight; while its beauty and drollness utterly silence criticism.

From the nature of the subject this play obviously required less of the dramatic and more of the poetic element than any other the poet has given us; and its comparative want of the former is amply made up by a profusion of the latter. The whole thing swarms with enchantment; all the sweet witchery of his sweet genius is concentrated into it, yet disposed with so subtle and cunning a hand, that like the inspiration of a summer evening we can neither grasp it nor get away from it. Abounding in lyrical and descriptive passages, the finest ever conceived by the wit of man, it probably has as much of character as is compatible with so much of poetry.

LECTURE X.

INTRODUCTION TO THE TRAGEDIES—ROMEO AND JULIET.

THE critic, who with half a knowledge of his office or of his subject undertakes the interpreting of Shakspeare's works, must often sigh over his inadequacy to the task, and blush for the little he can do compared to the much there is to be done. To the appreciating student of Shakspeare I must have often appeared already struggling with the magnitude of my theme: far more must this be the case in speaking of his tragedies. For if this strongest, yet calmest, this greatest, yet gentlest of mortals makes us tremble when he but breathes upon us the melodies and fragrances of his soul, he must perforce overwhelm us when he opens the floodgates of his power, and lets loose his tempests and cataracts upon us. Too much for criticism even when he smiles like some protecting spirit of humanity, and sheds the sunlight of his genius round its sweetest and gentlest transpirations, he may well strike criticism dumb with amazement when, like a divinity in the transports of his might, he rides upon the whirlwind and directs the storm of human passion. In his five great tragedies, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *Lear*, and *Othello*, all the capabilities of human thought and speech, all the resources of poetry and philosophy, of beauty, and sublimity, and pathos, and terror, seem exhausted. In at-

tempting an analytical exposition of these stupendous performances, the judicious critic will often find occasion to pause, and ask himself, whether he is stretching his grasp to the greatness of the subject, or shrinking the subject to the littleness of his grasp. For when science can bottle up the lightning and the sunshine for retail in drug-shops, then and then only may criticism think to impart a just conception of these wonderful productions. In bringing my teaspoon to this Niagara, I trust I am not ignorant on which side the danger lies : I have not forgotten, and shall not forget, that he who can look the sun in the face with undazzled eye, has some reason to distrust his sight. Wherefore, in regard to this part of the course, I can only say, I dare neither refuse to try nor hope to succeed ; I cannot expect to do much, and will not despair to do something ; and if my performances should be found small, I trust the smallness of my promises will not be forgotten. At all events, let me entreat you for your own sakes not to transfer the feebleness of my efforts to the account of my subject : and I shall deem myself fortunate if, small as I am, the greatness of my load do not crush me into less even than my usual dimensions.

That tragedy interests us mainly through the moral and religious principles of our nature, writers are generally agreed, however they may differ as to the reason thereof. And yet tragedy has its proper domain, for most part, in scenes of moral disorder, insomuch that its essence and interest may almost be said to consist in suffering virtue and successful villany. Why, then, do we take pleasure in tragical representations ? Is it because they anywise annul or enervate the law of virtue

by precluding the sanctions of a strict moral jurisprudence? or is it rather because they serve to confirm that law by generating the presentiment of a higher jurisprudence than we should otherwise naturally anticipate? Doubtless the latter is the true reason; for we may be assured that men can never be generally or permanently interested in what gratifies the lower, at the expense of the higher demands of their nature.

Now we naturally look, and cannot help looking, for a perfect system of moral government here; it is an instinct of our moral nature to expect a full, equitable, and impartial administration of distributive justice. We find no such thing, but, instead, a scene of great moral confusion, where the instinctive apprehensions and anticipations of conscience are continually crossed and thwarted. Such is the discrepancy between our moral instincts and moral experiences; conscience and the present state of things do not go together; the course of justice which nature prompts us to expect is broken off in the middle, and requires another scene for its completion. We find, indeed, the rudiments of a moral government, but not the results; and the world is full of beginnings that are to be finished elsewhere. Hence, doubtless, the almost universal impression of a future life, whither are carried forward the issues of a jurisprudence which falls so far short of a full consummation here. For, if there be no hereafter, then conscience, the principle of highest authority in our nature, is continually mocking us with apprehensions and anticipations to which there is no corresponding reality; and the voice of God within us, even while we are compelled to regard it as the voice of God, is stript of its

significance, and reduced to the ignoble office of at once telling us lies and persecuting us into a belief of them. Thus we are unavoidably driven to the alternative of either distrusting our moral nature, or trusting to a future life for a satisfaction of its claims. In effect, however, the moral deficiencies of this world only generate the expectation of another, where those deficiencies are to be made up: our anticipations of moral order here are but adjourned, to make room for anticipations of a still more grateful and exalted quality; and upon the very discrepancy between our moral instincts and experiences are built our noblest hopes and aspirations. So that the seeming defeats of virtue are in reality the source of her greatest triumphs; that she has not her rewards in this world, is our best assurance that this world has not wherewith to reward her.

Accordingly we find the anticipation of a future life existing everywhere rather as a sentiment than as an intellectual conviction; a sentiment complicated and interwoven with all the moral and religious elements of our nature, and not so much possessed by us as possessing us. We may indeed syllogize and sophisticate ourselves out of the conviction, still the sentiment will cling to us; expelled from the head, it will strike its roots still deeper in the heart; with or without our consent it will insinuate itself into our secret life, to feed us with hopes or torment us with fears: so that our only choice lies in having it for our guardian angel or our avenging fiend.

Here, then, it seems to me, is the true explanation of the interest mankind have always and everywhere taken in tragical representations. Such interruptions of moral

order are as storms agitating the soul to keep its waters pure and sweet ; and as they are wholesome, so they are grateful to us, for that our moral nature spontaneously construes them into intimations of a hereafter, where they are to be rectified and composed. Both the right of such representations to claim, and their power to engage our interest, result from their administering the best sort of food and discipline to the moral and religious principles of our being ; and their influences are most especially salutary then when those principles are in danger of being stifled amid the soul-killing arts, and excitements, and refinements of excessive civilization. We feel, in short, a sacred, solemn delight in exhibitions of suffering virtue and successful villany, because in adjourning the demands of conscience they open to our moral feelings and instincts the prospect and promise of immortality. Nor let it be supposed that our taking pleasure in such exhibitions is anywise prejudicial to our moral sensibilities. On the contrary, in those exhibitions virtue appears to us all the more lovely for her sufferings, and villany all the more hateful for its successes, because our nature, disenthralled for the time from worldly interests, is raised above herself into the region of moral disinterestedness, and faith, too strong for sight, takes the mind out of surrounding disorder, and carries it forward to the future and final issues of things.—To those who rightly appreciate both the moral interest and the moral disorder involved in Shakspeare's tragedies, the foregoing remarks will not seem inappropriate as an introduction to this part of the course.

ROMEO AND JULIET.

IN a former lecture I made some remarks on the alleged impurity of Shakspeare's plays. There is probably no point wherein the purity of his genius is better shown, than in his treatment of the passion of love. And it was in the handling of this passion that his contemporaries and successors, consulting rather what suited their audience than their office, let loose their impurity. Compared to them Shakspeare seems almost a seraph! The innocence of his lovers, and the inexpressible delicacy of their courtships, I have had several occasions to notice already. With him, indeed, love is uniformly a religion, ennobling the thought, purifying the heart, and rectifying the life. The sunshine of the soul, it enlightens while it warms, and turns the very clouds which rise from our earthly being into "a substance glorious as its own." There can be no better test of a poet's morality than this. The homage which Shakspeare has everywhere paid to purity, in thought, word, and deed, and the sanctity which he has uniformly breathed into the souls and manners of his lovers, are among the very highest and best influences to be met with in literature.

In its true form love is undoubtedly the purest as well as strongest of our passions. And such Shakspeare always represents it. No less ardent than innocent, the hearts of his lovers may be not unfitly compared to diamonds, which, once kindled, burn with an intensity and brightness, to which all other fires are feeble and dim. So that what hath been said of Schiller, may be said

with at least equal truth of Shakspeare:—"Before all other poets he maintains the prerogative of the purest, and at the same time strongest passion: no one of so pure a heart ever sustained this fire; no one of such fire ever possessed this purity." This union of purity and passion is truly the Pentecost fire into which all heroic souls are baptized,—the vestal flame that illuminates and guards the temple of every noble mind. Strong passion, at once restrained and deepened by elevated principle, is the source of every thing truly great and good in human character.

It is true, Shakspeare never attempts to deny or disguise the impulses of nature; for he knew very well that purity consists in sanctifying, not in renouncing them; that in their proper place and degree they are altogether sacred, innocent, and honourable: and he always so blends, and tempers, and proportions them with other elements that, while they do not attract particular attention, the whole seems the more perfect and beautiful for their presence. And indeed, to disguise those impulses is quite as bad as to parade them; and it is in the pretension and affectation of superiority to them, in the canting, conceited purism of Platonic sentimentality, that much of the impurity of life consists. No tree, it hath been well said, can blossom and bear fruit upwards, unless it first take root downwards; and there are always winds enough to blow down such as presume to dispense with the supports and conditions which nature hath prescribed.

For the union of purity and passion I know of nothing in literature equal to the tragedy of *Romeo and Juliet*;—a play which, in the words of Schlegel, "unites

purity of heart and the glow of imagination, sweetness and dignity of manners, and passionate violence in one ideal picture." It is the only work of the poet's in which the interest depends entirely on the passion of love. He did not need to touch the subject again; for he seems in this to have exhausted its capabilities: and as the play concentrates the essence of all that has yet been said on this immortal theme, so it overbuys all the rest of its kind put together. With the science and poetry of love we may here replenish our stock as often as we choose, and may always carry away as much as we can hold. If the play find us young, it will keep us so; if it do not find us young, it will make us so. Schlegel pronounces it "a glorious song of praise on that inexpressible feeling which ennobles the soul and gives it its highest sublimity, and which elevates the senses themselves into soul; and at the same time a melancholy elegy on its frailty from its own nature and from external circumstances; at once the deification and the burial of love."

Romeo and Juliet is a fine example of the poet's power to transfuse and penetrate all the materials of a drama with one predominant idea. The same youthful impetuosity, which transports the lovers almost at once from earth to heaven, and from heaven to the tomb, pervades and quickens every object and person we meet. It is spring; and all things have drunk the intoxication of the season: even where the frosts of winter are on the head, the voice of spring is in the mouth, the soul of spring is in the heart. In the words of Coleridge, "all is youth and spring;—youth with its follies, its virtues, and its precipitancies;—spring with its odours, its flowers, and

its transiency ; it is one and the same feeling that commences, goes through, and ends the play. The old men, the Capulets and the Montagues, are not common old men ; they have an eagerness, a heartiness, a vehemence the effect of spring ; with Romeo, his change of passion, his sudden marriage, and his rash death, are all the effects of youth ;—whilst in Juliet love has all that is tender and melancholy in the nightingale, all that is voluptuous in the rose, with whatever is sweet in the freshness of spring ; but it ends with a long deep sigh, like the last breeze of the Italian evening.”

Instinct with the spirit of the season, every thing is on the gallop, every thing is in excess ; all the passions of the drama are of the most nimble, fiery-footed, unmanageable description ;

“ Such life as lusty young men feel
When well-apparelled April on the heel
Of limping winter treads,”

everywhere meets and surrounds us ; the quick, vehement impatience of old Capulet, the fiery, hotspur valour of Tybalt, the brilliant, irrepressible volubility of Mercutio, and the restless gossiping loquacity of the Nurse, all are but so many symptoms of the reigning irritability and impetuosity. Amid this ubiquity and intensity of impassioned life, old feuds have broken out anew, old animosities are rekindled, suspended quarrels are resumed with unwonted violence ; while the interpositions of private friendship and public authority to quench the strife only go to prove it unquenchable : every thing is perturbation and excitement, the whole community is agitated and inflamed, citizens bring to the suppression

of tumults the same violent passions that produced them. The prevalence of extreme hate of course serves at once to generate and justify the opposite extreme ; out of the most passionate and fatal enmities there naturally springs a love as passionate and fatal. Surrounded by this strong toil of passion-kindling influences ; placed at the centre and convergence of so many streams of excitement ; amid the ravishments of a southern spring, and beneath the witchery of an Italian sky ; with dispositions too gentle and noble to sympathize with the reigning animosities ; “these storms that toss the private state and make the life unsweet” only tend to keep the hearts of the lovers alive and open to the deepest and strongest impressions of a contrary nature. Thus their passion comes upon us like a strain of the most voluptuous harmony from amidst the most jarring dissonance, the fierce rancour of their houses only swelling and strengthening within them the emotions that prevent their sympathizing with it. To borrow a figure, “the souls of the lovers seem two delicately-strung *Æolian* harps, at first wooed into a soft responsive melody by the whispering winds, anon seized by the furious blasts, and broken amid the most terrific yet most beautiful notes.”

With such infinite art and genius does Shakspeare diffuse the soul of passion around the lovers, that he may the more effectually awaken it within them. Without violating the laws of passion, he thus brings it to such a pitch of intensity as will induce perfect oblivion of self, and perfect abandonment to its object. And in this way does he prepare the readers as well as characters for the subsequent catastrophes. The leading passion, with all

its intensity, is so associated with others equally intense, that we receive it without the least sense of extravagance or disproportion to nature ; whereas, should we isolate it from the others, cut it out of the harmony and proportion in which it exists, it would seem overwrought and incredible,—a height to which human nature could not attain. The ranklings of hate, the yearnings of revenge, and the transports of love ; the flutterings of anticipation, the stings of disappointment, the heaven-kissing ecstasies of hope, and the earth-biting agonies of despair ; the fulness of life, the awfulness of death, tender embracings, bitter cursings, and funeral lamentings ;—these are the order of the day ; and all come along in such succession and proportion that the mind readily accepts and supports them all. Thus the poet keeps up the continuity of the impression ; thus securely bears our sympathies up the climax of his argument ; and carries us smoothly along through all the aching joys, the giddy, fearful raptures of the star-crossed lovers, by so disposing the objects and persons around them, that the soul of passion seems stealing not so much from them into us as into both them and us from some mysterious omnipresent source. In a word, he conceals from us the height of the perpendicular, as it were, in the facility of the inclination ; keeps us from being vertiginous by the equalitude of the surrounding materials ; not so much triumphing *over* us in the superiority of his own power, as causing us to triumph in the new power he awakens within us. And he does all this with so much ease that he never betrays his own exertions ; a true magician, his means are hidden in the very skill with which he uses them ; and we forget the height

to which he soars, because he has the strength of wing to bear us along with him, or rather, because he gives us wings to rise along with him of ourselves.

But whence and wherefore comes this so general reign of impetuous hate? Of this, too, the poet does not leave us ignorant. Its cause lies in a most strained, artificial, and unhealthy state of society, where all the safety valves of nature are closed up by a manifold, oppressive conventionality; where the better passions and impulses, being discouraged, overborne, and clogged down to their source, have turned their strength into those that are left; where, in short, men hate the more fiercely because they may not love freely, and their antipathies are the more violent because no play, no freedom is given to their sympathies. It is common, indeed, for reason and passion, principle and impulse, to be spoken of as opposed to each other; whereas few things are more certain, than that in ingenuous natures and in well-ordered societies they are developed simultaneously, or rather, each serves to unfold and deepen and strengthen the other; so that principle becomes warmed into impulse, and impulse becomes fixed into principle. Accordingly, one of the wisest and best of men speaks somewhere of our passions as instructing our reason; for the highest, noblest exercise of reason is in the form of a passion for the true, the beautiful, and the good. Men are never truly just, for example, until their justice is impassioned into honour; and even religion, so long as it lives, if indeed it can be said to *live*, but as a conviction of the understanding, is little better than a refinement of selfishness, and never truly deserves the name of religion, until it becomes a passion

of the soul. In short, the truly wise man is he who is wise in his passions, and impassioned in his wisdom ; that is, who thinks and acts with that integrity and entireness wherein reason and passion are mutually inclusive, so that passion does the work of reason, and reason approves the work of passion. When such is the case, the state of man has peace, unity, and prosperity ; otherwise, he is a house divided against itself, where reason and passion strive each for mastery, and sway by turns ; ignoble in all his thoughts, unstable in all his ways ; blind, headlong, sensual, and reckless in his passions,—cold, cunning, calculative and selfish in his reason.

This fatal discord and divorce of reason and passion is abundantly apparent in the manners and characters of the play under consideration. All the generous impulses of nature are kept in silence and subjection by a constant discipline of selfishness ;

“ And custom lies upon them with a weight
Heavy as frost, and deep almost as life.”

Coldly rational and calculative where they ought to be impassioned, people are of course blindly passionate and reckless where they ought to be deliberate and cool. Without passion in the graver, they are therefore without reason in the lighter, concerns of life. Even marriage, we can easily see, is altogether an affair of calculation and expediency, not of affection and conscience. It is thought unnecessary, perhaps improper for people to love before engagement, or even before marriage ; nay, for them to *love* at all. A previous union of hearts is rigorously discountenanced, lest it

should prevent or impede a prudent union of hands. Matches are made before the parties have been introduced to each other, by those who are not so romantic and extravagant as to think affection an important preliminary, and who are apparently inaccessible to any considerations but those of convenience, or prudence, or propriety. Thus marriage is no longer a religion, but only a policy; all its religious sanctions and sanctities being lost in the fanaticism of a worldly-minded expediency. As religion does not enter into the preliminaries, so of course the parties are to have no choice in the matter; but must sacrifice, or rather, prostitute themselves to the purpose of family aggrandizement, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life. In short, it is a state of society where the hearts of the young are if possible kept closed up against all deep, strong impressions, and the development of the nobler impulses is foreclosed by the icy calculations of interest and utility.

Amid all this soul-blighting, heart-withering refinement, the hero and the heroine stand out the unschooled and unspoiled creatures of native sense and native sensibility. Art has tried its utmost upon them, but nature has proved too strong for it; the cold breath of worldly wisdom has striven in vain to freeze the life out of their souls. Those around them do not know, they themselves do not know what they are made of: in the silent creativeness of youth their feelings have insensibly matured themselves; and they come before us glowing with the warmth of impassioned sentiment, with susceptibilities deep as life, and tender as infancy, and waiting only for the kindling touch of passion. Thus they exemplify the simplicity of nature thriving amid

the most artificial notions and manners. Nay, they are, at least they seem, but the more natural for the general prevalence of art around them ; as the brightest, freshest spots of verdure are often found amid the desert. It is as if nature, frightened away from the breasts of others, had taken refuge in them, and so concentrated herself with tenfold energy in their hearts.

Principle, however, is as strong in them as impulse. They have the purity as well as the passion, the innocence as well as the impulsiveness of nature. Having no immodest desires, they of course put forth no angelic professions ; do not force divinity upon the tongue because they hide no deviltry in the heart ; embosom no death, and therefore seek not the whitewashing of sentimental pretension. Nay, principle and passion in them are one and the same ; we cannot separate, we can scarce distinguish them. With them truth is a passion, purity is a passion, honour is a passion, just as infinite and enduring as is their passion for each other. They have that force and fulness of imagination which draws, blends, and fuses all the feelings, faculties, elements and principles of their nature, all their powers of reason, passion, soul, sense, head, and heart, into one, so that there can be no strife, no conflict, no division among them. Pervaded with this viviform and vivifying power, love steeped in truth, truth steeped in fire, become their ruling characteristics. Adoring, idolizing each other, they however make and would make none but pure and holy offerings ; and their fault lies not in the nature but in the object of their passion ; that they give to each other what, at least in the degree in which they give it, is due only to their Maker : but this is a

natural, I might almost say inevitable reaction from that idolatry of interest and of self which pervades the rest of society, turning marriage into merchandise, and sacrificing all the noblest and holiest instincts of nature to avarice, ambition, and pride. Thus in such a state of society the purest elements that remain,—the only salt indeed that can preserve from the taints and corruptions of self-love,—are those very passions and impulses which we often speak of as so impure and earthly ; but which, after all, we are much more apt to fall below than to rise above : for the great danger is, not that we shall love each other too much to regard our Maker, but that we shall love ourselves too much to regard either ; and where there is one man that worships his wife to the neglect of his God, there are doubtless fifty that worship themselves to the neglect of both. Hence we are told that

“ Love was given,
Encouraged, sanctioned, chiefly for this end—
For this the passion to excess was driven—
That *self* might be annulled ; her bondage prove
The fetters of a dream opposed to love.”

Impassioned, indeed, into an entire negation and oblivion of self, the lovers, however, do not lose their reason in the ardour of their passion : their love is rational because it is religious, hallowing and consecrating them in each other's thoughts ; otherwise, indeed, it were not love, and it were a sin to call it so. Nothing, therefore, can stand between their passion and its object but religion ; nor, on the other hand, can any thing force their passion to its object while religion forbids.

God has joined their hearts, and neither the frowns of fortune, nor the feuds of families, nor the maxims of worldly policy can prevent or ought to prevent their joining hands: but as their hearts are joined in mutual love, so their hands must be joined in mutual honour. The conventionalities of society have no hand in leading them, and therefore have no power to mislead them. In the ardor of a self-forgetting, self-annulling passion every earthly consideration,—friends, fortune, even life itself, every thing indeed but union with each other has faded from their thoughts: but, while they love each other with a love as boundless as the sea, they at the same time love in each other whatever is pure, and precious, and heavenly in their unsoiled imaginations. Nay, all they have hitherto known and prized of life seems flat and insipid compared to the new life they have found. Their love is now the precious jewel that enriches and consecrates the casket of their earthly existence; spoiled of this they cast it from them as useless and worthless.

“Come what sorrow can,
It cannot countervail the exchange of joy
That one short minute gives them,”

in each other's sight. Bereft of this, nothing remains for them but the bitter dregs, from which all the wine of life has evaporated; and they dash to earth the stale and vapid draught, when it has lost all the spirit that caused it to foam and sparkle before them.—Were we skilled in the ways of Providence, we might anticipate from the first, that these two noblest and loveliest of beings, the pride and hope of their respective friends,

even because they are themselves most innocent would fall a sacrifice for the guilt of their families ; and that in and through their death would be punished and healed those fatal strifes and enmities which have made it at once so natural and so dangerous for them to love.

The lovers, it is true, are not much given to reflection. Both have indeed abundance of intellect, but their intelligence is made spontaneous by force of passion and imagination. Reflection can legitimately come to them only by experience, which they have not yet acquired. Life lies glittering with golden hopes before them, owing its enchantment perhaps only to the distance ; and it is easy to see that they must die or suffer a disappointment worse than death. They have not yet eaten the fruit of the tree of knowledge, but they must eat it if they live. A throng of heavenly dreams has been awakened within them, and out of these they shape their expectations. Without experience of life, strangers to indifference, untried by disappointment, what have they, what can they have, to abate the transports of their newborn happiness, to hinder their gushing tide of joy from flowing on without stint or measure, to check the ardour of faith, of hope, of constancy just rising in their bosoms ? Knowing the rich promises of their own hearts, but not the poor performances of the world, they therefore frame their anticipations according to the infinitude of their own passions and hopes. Alas ! the paradise which they seem to see before them, exists only within them : their bliss seems perfect only because their bounty is infinite ; but such bounty and such bliss may not with mortal man abide. The heavenly fire that burns within them, even if the world could

feed it, their hearts could not sustain it, and even if their hearts could sustain it, the world could not feed it.

“ Too, too contracted are these walls of flesh
For any passion of the soul that leads
To ecstasy ; and, all the crooked paths
Of time and change disdaining, takes its course
Along the line of limitless desires.”

Not only must such lovers die in the triumphs of their love, but such love can triumph only in the death of the lovers. Edens like this can be let down from heaven upon us only for a few moments, and, when withdrawn, they must perforce either take themselves away from us, or take us away from earth along with them. So true it is that life gives us visions which death alone can enable us to realize ; and heaven dances before us only to allure us to the grave.

“ The soul that rises with us, our life’s star,
Hath had elsewhere its setting,
And cometh from afar :
Not in entire forgetfulness,
And not in utter nakedness,
But trailing clouds of glory do we come
From God who is our home.”

“ This bud of love, by summer’s ripening breath,
May prove a beauteous flower when next we meet ;”

such is the expectation of the inexperienced lovers, little dreaming that its very sweetness would provoke its enemy, and it must prove

“ a bud bit by an envious worm,
Ere it could spread its sweet leaves to the air,
Or dedicate its beauty to the sun :”

and when we look for the promised blossom, behold,

“Death lies on it like an untimely frost
Upon the sweetest flower of all the field.”

Of the catastrophe of this play, I can but repeat the remark of Schlegel, that “the echo it leaves in the mind resembles a single but endless sigh.” Yet no reflecting mind would wish it other than it is; for such a mind must see that the grave is the only place on earth that can preserve the union of the lovers as perfect as we see it and as lasting as we wish it. Awful as is their fate, they seem pitiable only in their lives, and enviable in their death; for the tomb does not extinguish, it inshrines the beauty of their love, and therein is far kinder to them than life would be. And who is there but would cheerfully share their fate for the sake of being and loving like them? Truly, he who would not willingly pay such a price in exchange for such a triumph seems worthy but to live; for,

“What comes from heaven, to heaven by nature tends,
And if kept back from thence, its course is short.”

It is not the passion of the lovers, but the enmity of their houses, that is punished in their death; and upon their tomb we read an awful lesson, not against loving to excess, but against that savage refinement, that barbarism of civilization, which makes love excessive by endeavouring to exclude it from its rightful place in life; and which subjects men to the just revenges of nature, because it teaches them to thwart her noblest, holiest purposes. Of course it is the tendency of evil, under

Providence, to work woe, and through woe to work its own cure; individuals and communities suffer from their vices, and by that suffering are reformed and purified. Thus, in the case before us, the pervading, absorbing, devouring selfishness of society generates the fiercest strifes and discords between its leading families; and those strifes and discords result in the death of their favourite members,—the very members through whom they had thought most to promote their interests and advance their rival pretensions: earth's best and fairest creatures are snatched away, because, by reason of their virtue, they can best afford to die, and because, for the same reason, their death will be most deeply felt and most bitterly deplored. The wise and good old friar thought indeed, that

“ this alliance might so happy prove
To turn their households' rancour to pure love;”

but a Wiser than he knew that such deep-seated evils could not be cured by such gentle means; that a tempest of sorrow was required to awe, touch, and melt their proud, selfish hearts into gentleness and humility; and that nothing short of the most afflicting bereavement, together with the feeling that they had themselves produced and deserved it, could teach them rightly to “prize the breath they share with human kind,” and remand them to the impassioned attachments of nature. Accordingly the enmity of the rival houses is buried in the tomb of the faithful lovers; the strife that made their love fatal is shamed down by the love that makes their death beautiful; families are reconciled, society is

renovated by the storm that has passed upon them ; the tyranny of selfish custom is broken up by the insurrection of nature which itself has provoked ; tears flow, hearts are softened, hands are joined, truth, tenderness, and piety are inspired by the noble example of devotion and self-sacrifice which stands before them. Such is the sad but wholesome lesson to be gathered from the heart-rending story of "Juliet and her Romeo." That Shakspeare designed to teach such a lesson, is evident both from the prologue and from the close of the play. In this way does the poet make the tragic Muse "subservient still to moral purposes, auxiliar to divine."

Of the characters in this play, especially the hero and heroine, it is exceedingly difficult to speak. In their sentiments and manners Romeo and Juliet, as we have already seen, exemplify the sweetness, simplicity, and disinterestedness of nature thriving amid the most selfish customs and the most oppressive conventionalities. As, in others, the perversions of artificial life have, for most part, crushed those impulses which ought to have been left, and left those which ought to have been crushed ; so, in these, the fire of noble passions seems to have gotten the start, and burnt up the dregs from which meaner passions take their growth. Their dispositions and aptitudes are of such a kind, that the strifes and discords going on around them only serve to revolt their minds, and send their thoughts to scenes of an opposite nature ; they are the more inclined to those feelings which prompt men to die for each other from the prevalence of those which prompt them to kill each other.

ROMEO.

It has been well said, that Romeo and Juliet, though in love, are not lovesick ; for to be in love and to be lovesick are two very different, and indeed incompatible things. Romeo, however, is lovesick until Juliet breathes into him the soul of love. He never truly loves, or even has an idea what love is, until in the festive hall in masquerade he feels irresistibly prompted to inquire,

“What lady’s that who doth enrich the hand
Of yonder knight?”

His seeming love for Rosaline is purely an affair of the fancy with which the heart has nothing to do ; a passion, not of the soul, but only of the blood. That the poet so meant it is plain from what he says about it in the chorus:—

“Now old desire doth in his death-bed lie,
And young affection gapes to be his heir.”

Accordingly it is airy, restless, affected, and fantastical ; making him close, secret, moody, solitary, contemplative ; disposed to think and speak much of his feelings, to count his sighs, magnify his sufferings, play with language, and practise to his shadow : his mind, in short, is altogether introversive, dallying with its own waking dreams and floating visions : he does not so much think of Rosaline, or of any thing he has found in her, as of a figment of his own fancy which he has

baptized into her name and invested with her form : she is merely the occasion, not the object of his feeling ; his passion being generated from within, not inspired from without. This is just that sort of love with which people often fancy themselves about to die, but which has never yet been known to live long enough to kill or even to hurt any one. For, though people do unquestionably sometimes die of love, when this is the case they never suspect what ails them ; their love, in proportion as it is dangerous, causing them to think and care less about themselves, and more about the person loved ; and when people begin to fear they are in danger on this score, they may be sure they are safe.—Romeo's passion is a thing infinitely different, both in kind and degree. It is not so much, what Hazlitt calls it, the sun hiding the stars, as the sun dissipating an ignis fatuus. A mere idolater, Juliet converts him into a true worshipper, and the fire of his new passion burns up the old idol of his fancy. The seeing her

“ teach the torches to burn bright,
And seem to hang upon the cheek of night
Like a rich jewel in an Ethiop's ear ;
Beauty too rich for use, for earth too dear !”

effectually cures him of his fancy-sickness, and prepares him for the sacrifice. He thinks he loves, perhaps tries to love, before he sees her ; but when he sees her, he only tries in vain not to love, and knows at once he never loved before ; for, though men often think they are awake when dreaming, they always know they are not dreaming when awake. The truth is, Romeo has been trying to kindle the gift waiting on the altar of his

heart, by the painted fire of his own imagination ; Juliet is the real fire from heaven that kindles it sure enough. There is now no more introversion of his thoughts, but a drawing out and concentrating of his whole mind, heart, soul, and sense upon her. Love regenerates and ennobles him : his dreamy, sickly, sentimental fancy giving place to a passion which, interesting him thoroughly in an external object, strings all his fine energies into harmony and eloquence ; from a sort of contemplative milksop he becomes a hero, a true man, with every thing clear, bright, healthy, and earnest about him. As the friar suggests, it was probably an instinct of his self-delusion, that he made love by rote not from experience, spoke from fancy not from feeling, that caused Rosaline to reject his suit. The dream, however, has the effect of preparing him for the reality, the counterfeit for the genuine ; while at the same time the contrast between them heightens our appreciation of the latter. Romeo's transition from the fancy to the passion is one of those things so frequent in Shakspeare, which, like the events of Providence, from their depth and subtilty of design are apt to seem the work of chance or caprice.

Hazlitt pronounces Romeo to be Hamlet in love ; than which he could not well have made a greater mistake ; indeed this is one of the many instances wherein he seems to have taken pleasure in stating the reverse of the truth. In all that most truly constitutes character, Romeo and Hamlet, it seems to me, are opposites, and have nothing in common. To go no further, Hamlet is all procrastination, Romeo all precipitancy ; the one reflects away the time of action, and loses the op-

portunity in getting ready for it ; the other, obedient to impulse, seizes the opportunity as it comes, or makes it where it is wanting, and acts before reflection. In short, with Hamlet it is a necessity of nature to think ; with Romeo it is a necessity of nature to love : the former, studious of consequences, gets bewildered with a multitude of conflicting passions and purposes ; the latter, absorbed in one passion and purpose, drives right ahead without regard to consequences : and as thinking prevents the one from acting, so action compels the other to think. It is this necessity of loving, which, until the proper object appears, creates in Romeo an object for itself. Hence the love-bewilderment in which he first comes before us. From a strong predisposition of nature, he is love-sick because he has nothing to love ; which explains and justifies the suddenness and violence of his passion, while the difference between this and his former fancy abundantly vindicates him from the reproach of inconsistency. It is worthy of special notice, that Romeo is perfectly certain and positive in a love of his own making, whereas the love inspired by another begets in him modesty and self-distrust. He was sure he should be true to Rosaline ; he fears he shall not be true to Juliet ; which fear beautifully expresses the tender concern of real love for its object. Men seldom doubt the truth of their dreams, but are very apt to distrust their perceptions, for the first effect of truth is, to convince them of their frailty. Such is the difference between self-delusion and genuine knowledge : men are naturally confident and positive in the former, doubtful and modest in the latter : their confidence in the one case springing from a preference of themselves to the object ;

their modesty in the other from a preference of the object to themselves.

Being composed and framed of passion, Romeo of course does not generalize, nor give much heed to abstractions and universals: intelligent, indeed, of present objects and exigencies, he does not, however, study to shape his feelings or his conduct according to the dictates of philosophy: in a word, he is altogether interested in things, not in thoughts; and therefore sees no use of philosophy in his case, unless it can make a Juliet; nor does he care to hear others speak of what they do not feel. It is for the same reason that he dwells with such exaggeration on the sentence of banishment. He has no life but passion, and passion lives altogether in and by an object. The counsels of prudence are lost upon him because he is so completely absorbed in a particular present good that he cannot give his mind to the general and remote; cannot draw upon the past or the future for relief or support under present afflictions. As he lives, and moves, and has his being in a finite object, he of course cannot stay himself upon truth, has nothing to live or rest upon in the absence of that object. Thus his passion, by reason of its excess, exalting a subordinate into a sovereign good, defeats its own security and peace: Juliet being his god, he cannot live away from her; and as she is but a woman, he cannot while in the world be always with her.

Yet there is a sort of living instinctive rectitude in his passion which makes us rather pity than blame its excess; and we feel that death comes upon him through it, not for it. It is hardly possible to conceive of any

thing more full of manly sweetness and gentleness than is his whole character. His enemies cannot deny that

“Verona brags of him
To be a virtuous and well-governed youth.”

Love is the only thing wherein he seems to lack self-control ; and this is the very thing wherein self-control is least a virtue. The “gentle breath, calm look, knees humbly bowed,” with which he expostulates with the fiery, reckless Tybalt, are equalled only by the spirit and energy with which he visits upon him the slaughter of his friend. Hardest to provoke, he is of course most dangerous when provoked. He is indeed the soul of honour, and with him

“Honour is the finest sense
Of *justice* which the human mind can frame,
Intent each lurking frailty to disclaim,
And guard the way of life from all offence
Suffered or done.”

His sense of honour, therefore, sees meanness only where his sense of duty sees wrong ; thus converting law into impulse, obligation into inclination. He will expose his life for a friend, but will not do a mean thing to save himself ; has no pride or revenge to which he is willing to sacrifice others, but has high noble principles and affections to which he is willing to sacrifice himself. Love is the germ of his mild nature, and he is terrible to others only when they violate the shrines of this. Thus even in his resentments he is in noble contrast with those about him ; his heart is so preoccupied

with generous sentiments as to afford no room for those furious revenges which prove so fatal in others : where their swords jump in wild fury from their scabbards, his sleeps quietly by his side ; where theirs hang perhaps like pieces of senseless iron, his leaps from his scabbard like a thing of life.

JULIET.

OF Juliet it is difficult for me to say any thing ; impossible for me to say much. Her character seems too private and sacred, is too much bound up in nuptial consecration, to be contemplated otherwise than with silent admiration and pity. She is like an expanding rose, enchanting both soul and sense with its voluptuous yet chaste perfume ; and whose wonderful complexity of structure is hidden in its still more wonderful beauty as a whole : a full analysis may indeed be necessary to a just appreciation of the divine art which fashioned it, but must dissipate the overpowering charm of the breathing creation.

As a heroine Juliet undoubtedly surpasses all the rest of Shakspeare's female characters, though perhaps inferior to several of them as a woman. Juliet, however, is a real heroine, in the best sense of the word ; her womanhood being developed in and through her heroism, not buried or obscured beneath it ; so that she both is and seems the more a woman for being a heroine. Herein she differs from the great majority of tragic heroines, whose heroism seems rather an unsexing than an unfolding of their characters ; who seem to lose, or

abate, or obscure their womanhood,—become mannish or viraginous,—as soon and as far as they become heroic. The trouble with them is, they set out with a special purpose to be heroines, go about it consciously and voluntarily ; whereas Juliet is surprised into heroism ; never wishes to be a heroine, nor dreams that she is one, but only knows she is a wife and has a husband who is dearer to her than life. To be a true and faithful wife, is the extent of her ambition : this she has the courage and the will to do at whatever cost ; and had she attempted more, she had probably done less.

Juliet's love differs not materially from that of the poet's other heroines, except that it includes the loves of them all ; has the innocence of Perdita's, the tenderness of Miranda's, the energy of Helena's, and the constancy of Imogen's. Subject to the same necessity of loving as Romeo, she is, however, exempt from the delusions of fancy, and therefore never gets bewildered with a love of her own making. An all-pervading but latent power, her love never assumes a dreamy, fantastical shape to send her in quest of an object ; she speaks not, thinks not, knows not of its existence until the true and real object appears : but no sooner is it kindled into actual being, than it absorbs all the life she has hitherto known into itself, so that henceforth no other life remains for her. She thinks of nothing but Romeo, and she thinks of him so intensely that she cannot choose but think aloud. She utters nothing but her passion, and in no language but that of imagination ; the only language indeed wherein so pure and delicate a mind can utter such a passion. Her modesty is not unlike Romeo's honour ; that is, she cares more to be modest

than to be thought or called so ; a modesty that knows no shame, because it has no thoughts or feelings of which it ought to be ashamed. Having sold herself to buy the mansion of a love, of course she cannot feel, and she will not affect, indifference whether she possesses it or not. She does not try to conceal or disguise from herself the impulses of her nature, because she justly regards them as sanctified by the religion of her heart. In a word, her perfect freedom from false modesty is the best possible proof of her perfect modesty ; for false modesty is really the most immodest thing in the world.

It is not till the marriage with Paris is attempted to be forced upon her, that the proper heroism of her nature displays itself. All her feelings as a woman, a lover, and a wife, are now thoroughly engaged. Originally formed of passion and imagination, she now appears an imagination set on fire of passion. To avert a blessing worse to her than death, she appeals imploringly to father, mother, and nurse in succession ; but in vain ; and it is not until cast entirely on her own strength, that she finds herself amply sufficient for herself. There is something truly fearful and sublime in the resolution and energy of her discourse with the friar ; yet we feel that she is the same soft, tender, gentle being whose breath was lately so sweet and rich with words of love.

“ God joined my heart and Romeo’s, thou our hands ;
And ere this hand, by thou to Romeo sealed,
Shall be the label to another deed,
Or my true heart with treacherous revolt
Turn to another, this shall slay them both :

Therefore, out of thy long experienced time,
Give me some present counsel ; or, behold
'Twixt my extremes and me this bloody knife
Shall play the umpire ; arbitrating that
Which the commission of thy years and art
Could to no issue of true honour bring."

When told the desperate nature of the remedy, she assumes a still higher tone ; her very terror of the deed apparently inspiring her with greater boldness of speech.

"O bid me leap, rather than marry Paris,
From off the battlements of yonder tower ;
Or walk in thievish ways ; or bid me lurk
Where serpents are ; chain me with roaring bears ;
Or shut me nightly in a charnel-house,
O'er-covered quite with dead men's rattling bones,
With reedy shanks, and yellow chapless skulls ;
Or bid me go into a new-made grave,
And hide me with a dead man in his shroud ;
Things that, to hear them told, have made me tremble ;
And I will do it without fear or doubt,
To live an unstained wife to my sweet love."

Heroic as she appears in the promise, she appears still more heroic in the performance. She cannot indeed arrest the workings of her imagination, neither can those workings arrest her resolution ; nay, their interaction seems to add greater energy and activity to them both ; the world of terrific images, which imagination sets before her, only developing within her a strength and courage to face them. The picture, whether for intrinsic grandeur or for outward effect, is among the finest ever conceived.

MERCUTIO.

IN Mercutio we have a perfect embodiment of animal spirits acting in and through the brain, making the fancy ever restless and procreative, the tongue ever voluble and antic, the wit as subtile and busy as magnetism, as apprehensive and quick as vitality. So long as the life is in him, his blood must dance, and so long as the blood dances the brain and tongue must play ; so that to live and to jest are almost the same thing with him. His veins seem filled with sparkling champagne. Of a careless free-and-easy mind, brimful of courage,—equally ready to frolic and to fight, unreflective, excitable, impetuous, he has withal a sprightly, benevolent temper that disposes him to sympathize with the cares of others and at the same time to laugh them away. Always reveling in the conscious abundance of his resources, he pours out, and pours out, heedless whether he speaks sense or nonsense, whether his jests be apt or awkward ; nay, his very stumblings seem designed as triumphs of agility ; he studies apparently to say flat things from his confidence of wit ; seems to delight in his failures as giving occasion for further trials, thus at once provoking and offsetting his skill. Full of the most companionable qualities, he often talks loosely indeed, but never profanely ; and even in his loosest talk there is always a smacking of the gentleman and the scholar,—a subtlety and refinement both of nature and of breeding, that marks him for the prince of good fellows. Nothing could more finely evince the strong bias of nature and habit in him, as well as the pleasurable emo-

tion, the luxury of mere existence, than that, with his ruling passion strong in death, he should laugh in the face of his grim enemy, and breathe his life out in a kind of grave and solemn jests ; as if it were a law of his being never to be more than half serious, and even in his sharpest pangs and agonies there must be an infusion of playfulness.

Mercutio is one of those innumerable forms of genius embosomed in Shakspeare's mind, which strikingly evince the excess of the poet's resources above his performances. Though giving us more than all other men, still he seems to have given us but a small portion of himself ; and, for aught we can see, he could have gone on indefinitely revelling in the same "exquisite ebullience and overflow" of life and wit which in Mercutio he has started. More anxious to instruct us in character than to entertain us with talk, he often gives just enough of the latter to disclose the former, and then stops, leaving upon us a sense of an inexhaustible abundance withheld for want of opportunity or occasion. From the nature of the subject the poet was compelled to leave unsatisfied the desire which in Mercutio he had excited. Delightful as is the character, the poet valued and we value his room more than his company. It has been often said, that he was obliged to kill Mercutio, lest Mercutio should kill him ; and, though I should hardly venture to say what the poet could or could not have done, I must confess it is not easy to see how he could have kept Mercutio and Tybalt in the play without spoiling it, or kept them out of the play without killing them : for, so long as they live, they are obviously bound to have a chief hand in every

thing going on about them; and it seems hardly possible that they should have a hand in any thing without turning it, the one into a comedy, the other into a butchery. The poet, however, so manages them and their fate as to aid rather than interrupt the proper interest of the work; the impression of their death, deep as it is, being lost in the sympathy awakened in us for the living. Thus what in other hands would be hindrances, in his become helps to the leading purpose; and he turns the very greatness of his subordinate events and characters into stepping stones for the still greater ones which he has in store for us.

Of Mercutio's wit it were vain to attempt an analysis. From a fancy as rapid and aerial in its evolutions as the Aurora Borealis, the most airy, unique, and graceful combinations come forth with almost inconceivable facility and felicity, so agile we cannot catch, so subtile we cannot grasp them. If wit consists in a peculiar briskness, airiness, and apprehensiveness of spirit, easily turning itself to all things or turning all things to itself, finding out the most remote, secret, and delicate affinities, and putting things together most unexpectedly and at the same time most appropriately, it can hardly be denied that Mercutio is the prince of wits as well as of good fellows. His discourse has nearly all the qualities contained in Dr. Barrow's celebrated description of wit, which is indeed the work of a master, and withal as accurate a likeness of Mercutio as if the author had taken him for his original. To that description, as it is too long as well as too good for insertion here, I must refer you for one of the richest, raciest, liveliest passages in English prose; a passage scarcely

less witty in itself than descriptive of wit ; at once an analysis and an example of it.

THE NURSE.

COLERIDGE says, that "the Nurse is the nearest of any thing in Shakspeare to a direct borrowing from mere observation." And, indeed, original as is her character, it would not be easy to name another that so startles us with a sense of reality. She seems a literal transcription from actual life ; and the wonder of it is, that she should be so lifelike as an individual and yet so descriptive of a class ; that she should seem just like some people we have all known, yet perfectly distinct from them. Doubtless this impression of historical truth springs from the predominance of memory in her mind, whereby she comes to see things only as they occur in time and place, and always thinks and speaks of them in their actual not in their logical order. Thus, in her account of Juliet, we see that she can follow no rule but that of local and chronological juxtaposition ; and that she cannot go on with the story without bringing in all the accidents and impertinences which she has arbitrarily associated with it. And her frequent repetition of the same thing, in the same words, gives the impression of a fact cleaving to her memory, and exercising a sort of fascination over her thoughts. Every thing, in short, seems to recur to her precisely as it happened ; her talk is so perfectly literal and matter-of-fact as to preclude all idea of fiction in her case ; it seems impossible that any thing but an actual person

should be so enslaved to actual events. As she is altogether absorbed in the mere facts of her experience, so of course every thing about her savours strongly of her calling and employment; her whole mind being made up of the objects and events of the nursery. Yet there is a certain vulgarized air of rank and refinement about her, as if, proud of the favour and confidence of her superiors, she had caught and assimilated their manners to her own vulgar nature and sphere. Thus her character is one of those queer mixtures of refinement and vulgarity such as we often see in persons of similar calling; a mixture wherein both elements are, or at least appear the worse for being together: for like all those who try to ape their betters, she of course only copies the faults of her model; or, borrowing the proprieties of those above her, she turns them into their contraries, because she has no sense of propriety, and therefore knows not where, or when, or how to use them. As might be expected, the vices of surrounding society have in her character fairly come to a head; have worked out to their last results, so as to appear in their most undisguised, unmitigated, offensive form: for she is the product of the two extremes of society; and, by the rule of moral proportions the product of the extremes will be generally found to equal the product of the means. Without a particle of truth, or honour, or delicacy; one to whom life has no sacredness, virtue no beauty, love no holiness; in short, a woman utterly without womanhood,—the germs of womanhood either having never been planted, or having all rotted within her;—she abounds, however, in serviceable qualities; has just that low servile prudence which at once fits her

to be an instrument and makes her proud to be used as such : howbeit she will never push her services to the perilling of her interests, nor omit any opportunity to tyrannize over those whom she serves, by inflicting upon them her heedless, petulant, irksome garrulity ; and, if checked in her impertinent talk, she submits at once, and breeds occasion thence to repeat what she already said, thus continually ducking under and then rising against the commands of her employers. Yet she acts not so much from disregard of right as from lethargy of conscience ; in her basest acts never dreaming but that she is setting an example of virtue ; her very loquacity having apparently paralyzed her moral sense, and her soul having run itself dry through a leak at the mouth. A mere bundle of acquired impulses in whom the conventionalities of society have become second nature, without principle and without passion, the contrast between her and the artless, impassioned, seraph-souled Juliet is as fine as can well be conceived. That the loathsomeness of the one and the loveliness of the other should so appropriately draw out and set off each other, is a stroke of art which perhaps could become natural only in the pages of Shakspeare, but by imitating which nature might almost be said to improve upon herself. The Nurse is so utterly dead to moral perceptions, so entirely innocent and unconscious of her own vices, that Juliet thinks her free from them, and never suspects but that underneath her petulant, vulgar loquacity, there runs a vein of womanly honour and sensibility ; otherwise, indeed, she could never have employed her even as an instrument, but would have shrunk from her as from a walking pestilence. When,

however, in the noble agony of distress she appeals to the Nurse for counsel, who with the impudence of unconscious depravity counsels her, while "her husband is on earth, her faith in heaven," to marry Paris; she sees at once the unfathomable baseness of her character: that her former praises of Romeo sprung, not from a sense of his merits, but from an impulse of sensual garrulity: that in her long life she has acquired only that sort of experience which works the debasement of its possessor: and that she knows less than nothing of love and marriage, because she has worn their prerogatives without any feeling or perception of their sanctity. It is hard to say whether Juliet's purity and rectitude of mind be more apparent in her former ignorance or in her present abhorrence of the Nurse's character.

THE FRIAR.

WHETHER from a fault in himself or in the public for whom he wrote, it is a remarkable fact, that Shakspeare never attempts to show his respect for religion and law by reviling ministers and magistrates; nor was he so scrupulously just and charitable as to represent all poor men as wise, temperate, honest, and unfortunate, and all rich men as cheaters, extortioners, and sensualists: in a word, he was not so enlightened and sanctified as to identify social with moral distinctions; he therefore found, or perhaps fancied, something besides virtue in hovels, and something besides vice in palaces; priests were not all villains, princes were not all dunces, criminals were not all heroes, beggars were not all saints,

with him. Which will probably account for certain sneers and censures which have lately been cast upon him, as not being a reformer, but as being content to let things remain as he found them ; as giving no " prophecy " of " a good time coming," nor making any efforts to bring it about ; in other words, that he did not patronize Providence, nor try to rectify the moral government of the universe, so that all men, and especially all reformers, should be immediately rewarded according to their deserts, themselves being judges.

Perhaps this sad obliquity of Shakspeare's mind is nowhere more sadly betrayed than in the character of Friar Laurence, one of those beautiful examples of clerical wisdom, honesty, and benevolence which the poet evidently delighted to represent. That he should have made the friar such as he is, is the more to be regretted forasmuch as he had every opportunity to make him the reverse. If, for example, he had set him forth as a signal instance of priestly cunning and malignity, retiring from the world that he might the better vex and corrupt it ; as marrying the lovers out of revenge for some slight thrown upon him by their families, and then giving Juliet a deadly poison, instead of something that should only " work on her the form of death," " lest in their marriage he should be dishonoured ;"—if the poet had done this, would he not have shown a far more laudable concern for the interests of humanity, and perhaps have contributed something towards the overthrow of an odious and abominable order ? But, alas ! not having the fear of God before his eyes, " without any real sympathy for moral goodness," being " himself in fact a sort of Falstaff," and so caring for nothing but to eat, drink,

sleep, and digest, he was meanly content to echo and flatter the superstitious confidence of a priest-ridden public.

As if on purpose to prepare our minds for acquiescence in the miracle of the sleeping potion, the Friar is first brought before us culling "baleful weeds and precious-juiced flowers," and descanting on "the powerful grace that lies in herbs, plants, stones, and their true qualities." Mindful of the difference between the marvellous and the monstrous, the poet thus contrives in the outset to alleviate the improbability of the after proceedings; by throwing an air of mysterious wisdom around the monk, he renders us the more apt and inclined to believe strange things respecting him; represents him as so conjunctive and private with nature, that incredulity concerning what he does is in a great measure precluded by impressions of reverence for his character, and of wonder at his knowledge. "In this manner," says Schlegel, "a circumstance of an ungrateful appearance becomes the source of a great beauty. The discourse of the pious old man is full of deep meaning: he sees everywhere in nature emblems of the moral world; and the same wisdom with which he looks through her has also made him master of the human heart." It is hardly needful to suggest how finely the Friar's tranquillity contrasts with the surrounding agitation, or how natural it is that he should draw lessons of tranquillity from that very agitation. Calm, thoughtful, beneficent, withdrawing from the world, that he may live above it while in it, and that he may benefit society the more for being out of it, his presence and counsel in the play are as oil poured, yet poured in vain, upon troubled

waters. Extracting "adversity's sweet milk, philosophy," from whatever objects and occurrences he meets; sympathizing calmly yet deeply with the very feelings in others which in the stillness of thought he has subdued in himself; and dwelling in the depths, not in the tumults of the soul;—the storms which waste society only serve to kindle within him the thoughts that raise him above them; and his voice, issuing from the heart of wisdom, and sweetened with the music of humanity, speaks peace, but cannot give it, to the passions that are raging around him: his efforts to heal the strifes and perturbations, though unavailing, and even mischievous in their immediate effects, still seem apt and wise, and are even proved to be the more needful by the very circumstance that renders them ineffectual; and, as he acts upon good grounds and with the best intentions, so in his miscarriages he feels and makes us feel, that "a greater Power than he can contradict hath thwarted his intents," as if on purpose to show the insufficiency of human counsels for the management of human affairs.

LECTURE XI.

HAMLET.

THE tragedy of Hamlet has probably caused more of perplexity and discussion than any other of Shakspeare's plays. Others of them may have more of interest for particular minds, or particular states of mind, or particular periods of life: but none of them equals Hamlet in universality of interest. Doubtless this results, in part, from the hero's being "a concentration of all the interests that belong to humanity." His history is the very extraction and efficacy of the thoughts and feelings and inward experiences of us all; his life is a picture of blighted hopes and crushed affections, from which we may solve the darkest enigmas of our existence, and over which our aching hearts may bleed themselves into repose. Hamlet, in short, is an universal genius, in the depth and variety of his feelings and faculties almost rivalling Shakspeare himself, and engaged, not in creating or revealing the true, the beautiful, and the good, but in conflict with the dark powers of the world. If there be a heart whose best affections have never been breathed upon by hope nor broken down by despair; which has never been called to weep over the desecration or the degradation of its most cherished objects; which has no springs of life to be sweetened by sympathy or embittered by disappoint-

ment; and which has put forth no promises to be fanned by airs from heaven or scorched by blasts from hell;—such a heart may indeed contemplate the picture of Hamlet without emotion, and may find exemption from the sorrows of life in the iceberg of its own insensibility.

Coleridge very finely remarks, somewhere, that Shakspeare's characters are classes of men individualized. Of most of them this seems to me profoundly true; and Hamlet seems to differ from the others in that he is the race itself individualized. He is a sort of glass wherein we may all see ourselves, provided we have any self; and it is not so correct to say, that he represents any one man or class of men, as that he represents them all. Hamlet, in short, is the very abridgment and eclecticism of humanity: in the words of another, it is *we* who are Hamlet.

Accordingly, scarce any character in history has provoked so great a diversity of opinion as Hamlet; for the more generic and comprehensive a man is, the more various will the judgments of men naturally be concerning him. One man thinks Hamlet is great but wicked; another, that he is good but weak; a third, that he is a coward and dare not act; a fourth, that he has too much intellect for his will, and so reflects away the time of action. Doubtless there are facts in the representation which, considered by themselves, would sustain any one of these views; but none of them seems reconcilable with all the facts taken together. Yet, notwithstanding this diversity of facts and conclusions, all agree in thinking and feeling and speaking about Hamlet as an actual person. It is easy, indeed, to invest with plausi-

bility almost any theory in regard to him ; but it is extremely hard to make any theory comprehend the whole subject : and, though all are impressed with the truth of the character, no one is satisfied with another's explanation of it. The question is, why, with this unanimity as to his being a man, do men differ so much as to what sort of a man he is ?

In reasoning upon facts we are apt to forget what complex, many-sided things we are dealing with. We often speak of them as very simple and intelligible things, whereas, in reality, they are most profoundly and inscrutably mysterious : they may indeed be used to explain other things, but they cannot themselves be explained. For example, how many causes, elements, conditions and processes go to the forming of a rose ? The combined agencies of all nature work together in its production,—are all represented by it, and inferable from it. Thus facts involve and infer many things at the same time ; they present manifold elements and qualities in consistency and unity, and so express a diversity of meanings which cannot be gathered up into a form of logical explanation. Even if we seize and draw out severally and successively all the properties of a fact, still we are as far as ever from producing the effect of their combination in the fact itself. It is this mysteriousness of facts that begets our respect for them, our docility to them, and our interest in them : could we master them, we should cease to regard them ; could we explain them, we should feel at liberty to substitute our explanations for the things explained. For, to see round and through a thing, implies a sort of conquest over it ; and when we get, or think we have got, above a thing,

we naturally either overlook it, or else look down upon it: finding or fancying we have mastered a thing, we are apt to neglect it, or, what is worse, put off that humility towards it, which, besides being itself the better part of wisdom, is our only key to the remainder.

In this complexity of facts is obviously contained the material of innumerable theories; for, "in so great a store of properties belonging to the self-same thing, every man's mind may take hold of some special consideration above the rest;" and it is characteristic of facts, that, seen through any given theory, they always seem to prove only that one, though really affording equal proof to fifty other theories. In short, many of the elements, perhaps all the elements of truth may meet together in a fact; and nothing is more common than for several minds to single out different elements of the same fact, and then go on to reason from a part as from the whole. Hence there naturally come to be various opinions respecting the same fact: generalizing too hastily from the surface of things, men often arrive at contradictory conclusions, forgetting, that of a given fact a vast many things may be true in their place and degree, yet none of them true in such sort as to hinder the truth of others. Human life is full of practical as well as speculative errors and mistakes, resulting from this partial and one-sided view of things: seizing some one principle, or being seized by it, men proceed, as they say, to carry it out; never stopping to think how it is limited and restrained on all sides by other principles. Thus men often draw a button so near the eye as to shut out all the rest of creation, and then go smashing

through the world, mistaking their own ignorance or obstinacy for conscientiousness.

Now Hamlet is undoubtedly the most complex character in dramatic literature. He is all varieties of character in one; is continually turning up a new side, appearing under a new phase, undergoing some new development; and before we can measure and map him in any one form he has passed into another. He thus touches us at all points, surrounds us, as it were, so that great circumspection is required to see the whole of him at once, and so to avoid mistaking him for several persons. This complexity and versatility of character has often been mistaken for inconsistency; hence the contradictory opinions respecting him, different minds taking up very different impressions of him, and even the same mind taking up very different impressions of him at different times. Hamlet, in short, like other facts, is many-sided, and many men of many minds may see themselves in different sides of him; but when, upon comparing notes, they find him agreeing with them all, they are perplexed, and conclude him inconsistent, because they are themselves too one-sided to recognize his consistency. In so great a diversity of elements and principles they lose the perception of identity, and cannot see how he can be so many and still be but one. Doubtless Hamlet seems the more real for the very reason that we cannot understand him; our inability to see through him, or to discern the source and manner of his impression upon us, brings him closer to nature, makes him appear the more like a fact, and so widens and deepens his hold on our thoughts. For where there is life there must naturally be more or less of change, the very law of life

being identity in mutability; and in Hamlet the variety and rapidity of changes are so managed as only to infer the more intense, active and prolific vitality. In this multitude of changes, however, it is extremely difficult to perceive the constant principle; these outward contradictions make the character more powerful indeed on the feelings, but much less intelligible to the mind; they help us to feel, but hinder us from seeing, the inward vital unity whence they spring.

As is generally the case with Shakspeare's characters, in order to apprehend Hamlet aright it is necessary to go round behind the text into the elements and processes of his mind, whereof the text but gives the results. For one of the excellencies in which Shakspeare is without a competitor, is that of painting the interior history of minds: while unfolding their present condition he at the same time suggests a long series of preceding conditions; pourtrays in far-stretching perspective the various stages and changes of a mind, each growing out of, and growing above, the one that preceded it. Among these instances of historical perspective perhaps there is none more worthy of study than Hamlet.

Up to his father's death Hamlet's mind, busied in developing its innate riches, had found room for no sentiments towards others but a gentle and generous trust and confidence. Delighted with the appearances of good, and protected by his rank from the naked approaches of evil, he had no motive to pry through the semblances into the reality of surrounding characters. The ideas of princely elevation and of moral rectitude, springing forth simultaneously in his mind, had inter-twisted their fibres closely and firmly together. While

the chaste forms of youthful imagination had kept his own heart pure, he had framed his conceptions of others according to the model within himself. To the feelings of the son, the prince, the gentleman, the friend, and the scholar, had lately been joined the feelings of the lover; and his heart, oppressed by the redundancy of hopes and joys that enriched it, had breathed forth its fulness in "almost all the holy vows of heaven." Though soaring at will into the loftiest, or grasping the widest, or scanning the deepest regions of thought, he yet felt how poor and paltry are all the gifts and shows of intellect, compared to purity and gentleness and lowliness of heart; could repose, with all the satisfaction which superior natures alone can know, upon the bosom of virgin innocence and virgin loveliness; and in the simple goodness which is unconscious of itself from its very perfection, could discern a worth which puts to shame the proudest exhibitions and triumphs of mind.

In his father, endowed with every royal and manly quality, Hamlet had realized the bright ideal of character which he aspired to exemplify in himself. Whatever noble images and ideas he had gathered from the fields of poetry and philosophy, he had learned to associate with that sacred name. To the throne he looked forward with hope and with fear, as an elevation from whence to diffuse the blessings of a wise sovereignty, and receive the homage of a grateful submission. To reproduce in himself his father's character, was, in his view, to deserve, and therefore to secure, his father's place; and, as the crown was not hereditary, he regarded his own prospects of succession as suspended on the continuance of his father's life, until he could dis-

cover in himself the virtues that originated his father's title. In his father's death, therefore, he lost the chief support of both his affections and his pretensions.

But though bereavement and disappointment had thus united to teach Hamlet the power of sorrow, the foundations of his peace and happiness were yet unshaken. The prospects of the prince had perhaps vanished only to disclose still brighter prospects for the man. He could still love and trust and revere; the fireside and the student's bower were yet open to him; truth and beauty, thought and affection, had not yet hidden their faces from him. His mind, though deeply saddened and subdued, was not diseased; and his bereavement had the effect to quicken and chasten his sensibility without disordering his affections. With a heart cunning and prompt to discover and appropriate the remunerations of life, he could compensate the loss of some object with a more free and tranquil enjoyment of such as remained. In the absence of his father he could collect and concentrate upon his mother the feelings hitherto shared between them; and, in cases like this, the part of an object often exceeds the whole, inasmuch as a religious feeling towards the dead comes in to enrich and sanctify an affection for the living. And even if his mother also had but died, the loss, though unspeakably bitter, would not have been baleful to him; for, though separated from the chief objects of his love and trust and reverence, he would still have retained those sentiments themselves in all their strength and beauty. Nay, death would not so much have taken her away from him, as brought her nearer to his feelings and raised her to a higher place in them; as her form vanished from his

sight, the sweet sacred image of a mother which filial piety loves to cherish would have come,

“Apparelled in more precious habit,
More moving-delicate, and full of life,
Into the eye and prospect of his soul,
Than when she lived indeed.”

For when those whom such a being loves die with their honours fresh and bright about them, they become, in some sort, omnipresent and immortal to him :

“The future brightens on his sight,
For on the past has fallen a light
That tempts him to adore.”

It is not with his mother, however, but with his faith in her that Hamlet is forced to part ; it is not herself, but her honour that dies to him. To his prophetic soul her hasty and incestuous marriage brings at once conviction of his mother's infidelity and suspicion of his uncle's treachery to his father. In the disclosure of her guilt and baseness his best affections themselves suffer death : for while, to such a mind, death immortalizes the objects of its love, infamy annihilates them. Where he has most loved and trusted and revered, there he finds himself most deceived. The sadness of bereavement now settles into the deep dark gloom of a wounded spirit ; and life appears a burden to be borne, not a blessing to be cherished. In this condition, the appearance of his father's ghost, its awful disclosures and still more awful injunctions, confirming the suspicion of his uncle's treachery and implicating his mother in the crime, complete his desolation of mind.

But this is not all: The garden of his own life having now become a desert, he feels that he can breathe nothing but desolation over the life which he has once sweetened with the music of his vows. In his terrible visitation he reads the necessity of giving up the gentle, the cherished Ophelia; for he loves her too well to entangle her in the web of horrors from which he sees no escape for himself. But, though he resigns the object of his love, he does not and cannot resign the love itself; and the consciousness that he must leave her whom he loves, and leave her even because he loves her, finishes the death and burial of his hopes.

“The sigh so piteous and profound,
As it did seem to shatter all his bulk,
And end his being,”

could only spring from the depths of a wounded spirit, as he gazed, in the anguish of despair, on the beloved one who had written her name all over his thoughts.

So much for Hamlet's internal history until the extinction of his earthly prospects and purposes in the awful words, “Remember me.” But amid these accumulated agonies, and though suffering all that he can suffer save remorse and self-reproach, he yet retains all his original integrity and uprightness of soul, and his quick moral sensibilities shrink from the very conception of meanness and wrong. In the depths of his being, even below the region of distinct consciousness, there lurks the instinct and impulse of a moral law that forbids revenge, especially such a revenge as he is called upon to administer. With this impulse of rectitude thus dimly and deeply working within him the injunc-

tion of his father's ghost comes in conflict. What, indeed, is the quality of the act enjoined upon him? Nothing less, to be sure, than to kill at once his uncle, his mother's husband, and his anointed sovereign: and this deed, thus involving homicide parricide and regicide all rolled into one, he is called to perform, not as an act of justice and in a judicial manner, but as an act of revenge and by assassination. Surely this could hardly be expected of one who had the misfortune to live before the dawn of that wisdom which so admirably teacheth, that to kill a father, or mother, or bishop, or king, is but common homicide! How shall Hamlet justify such a deed to the world? how vindicate himself from the reproach of the very crime he is called upon to revenge? For the evidence upon which he is required to act is in its nature available at best only in the court of his own conscience. In view of such an act he might well say to himself:

“If I could find example
Of thousands who had struck anointed kings,
And flourished after, I'd not do 't; but since
Nor brass, nor stone, nor parchment, bears not one,
Let villany itself forswear 't.”

Hamlet, then, is called upon to punish one crime by committing what seems to him another crime; for the same religion which in his mind enjoins filial piety also forbids revenge; so that he dare neither reject nor perform the mandate from the ghost. Thus his conscience is divided, not merely against his inclination, but against itself; it plucks him on and plucks him off; it provokes the resolution, but prevents the performance. However

much he multiplies reasons and motives upon himself in favour of the deed, there yet springs up from a depth in his nature which reflection has never fathomed, an impulse against it which he can neither account for nor resist. The truth is, his moral instincts are too strong for his intellectual convictions. It is the triumph of a pure moral nature over temptation in its most imposing and insinuating form,—in the form of a sacred call from heaven, or what is such to him. He thinks, indeed, that he ought to perform the act, resolves that he will do it, and blames himself for not doing it; but there is a power within him and yet above him, which, in spite of himself, overmasters his resolutions and thwarts them; and he cannot do the thing for the simple reason, though he knows it not and believes it not, that he is too good to do it. The trouble with him, in short, lies not in himself, but in his situation; it all arises from the impossibility of translating the outward call of duty into a free spontaneous moral impulse; and of course he cannot perform it until he has so translated it; for he is so constituted, that in such an undertaking he must act from himself, not from another.

It is from this strife between incompatible duties that Hamlet's perplexity and indecision spring. For escape from this dilemma all his faculties and resources are taxed and strained to the uttermost. His moral sensitiveness, shrinking from the dreadful summons to revenge, throws him back upon his reflective powers, and sends him through the abysses of thought, in quest of a reconciliation between his conflicting duties, so that he may shelter either the performance of the deed from the reproach of irreligion, or the non-performance from the

reproach of filial impiety. In this condition springs of thought and feeling and action beyond the reaches of our minds, are opened within him. Here, then, we have an example of a great mind so circumstanced that all its greatness has to come out in thought; which, indeed, seems to have been the poet's design.

And it should be especially remarked withal, that the same voice which calls Hamlet to this terrible undertaking also reveals to him the fearful retributions of futurity; so that in proportion as he is nerved by a sense of the duty he is at the same time shaken by a dread of the responsibility. "The eternal blazon," which "must not be to ears of flesh and blood," hurries him away from action into meditation on the dread realities of the invisible world; and his resolution is suspended by the apprehensions started up in his mind by the ghost's disclosures respecting "the secrets of its prison house." Nay, his filial reverence itself leads him, first to regret, then to doubt, and finally to disbelieve, that his *father* has laid upon him an injunction so repugnant to his sense of right. Upon reflection he discerns in the nature of the mandate something that makes him question and distrust its source; it clashes with his sentiment of moral rectitude; and he wisely thinks, that "light which leads astray cannot be light from heaven." It seems to him more probable that the ghost should be a *counterfeit* of his father, than that his *father* should give such an order. He must "have grounds more relative than this;"—

"The spirit that I have seen
May be a devil: and the devil hath power
To assume a pleasing shape; yea, and, perhaps,

Out of my weakness and my melancholy,
 (As he is very potent with such spirits \
 Abuses me, to damn me."

Thus the hope that the ghost's tale may be false, and the fear that it may be true, unite to send him in quest of other proofs. The probability seems at once too strong to justify the abandonment, and too weak to justify the execution of the deed. The truth is, the ghost developes Hamlet, and the development it works within him is at war with the injunction it lays upon him : its supernatural revelations bring forth into clearer apprehension some moral ideas which before were but dim presentiments within him ; and its requisitions are thwarted by the very truths which it suggests and unfolds to him, and by the train of reflections which it sets a-going in his mind. Under the disclosures made to him from beyond the grave his mind attains a kind or degree of development not ordinarily vouchsafed to our earthly being. It is as if he were born into the other world before dying out of this. But the *words* from that other world must be confirmed by *facts* from this, before he can bring himself to trust in them ; and therefore

"the play's the thing
 Wherein he'll catch the conscience of the king."

When, however, he has caught the king's conscience ; when, by holding the mirror up to his soul, he has forced "his occulted guilt" to "unkennel itself;" along with certainty of the crime he gains food for still further reflection. The demonstration of his uncle's guilt arrests

the very purpose for which that demonstration was sought; his own conscience being startled into a dread of the retribution he has disclosed in the conscience of another. He has sought grounds of punishment in the manifestations of remorse; and the very proofs which to his mind justify the infliction of death, themselves spring from a worse death than he has power to inflict. It is thus that Hamlet is distracted with a purpose which he is at once too good a son to dismiss and too good a man to perform. Under an injunction with which he knows not what to do he casts about, now for excuses, now for censures, of his non-performance; and religion prevents him from doing what filial piety reproves him for omitting. While he dare not abandon the design of killing the king, he is at the same time morally incapable of forming any plan for doing it: he can only do it, and he does only attempt it under a sudden frenzy of excitement caused by some immediate provocation; not so much acting as being acted upon; as an instrument of Providence rather than as a self-determining agent.

And this view of Hamlet is rather confirmed than otherwise by the motives which he assigns for sparing the king when he finds him praying. That these motives, too horrible even for a fiend to entertain, are not his real motives, is evident from their extravagance; for if such motives would keep him from doing the deed then, assuredly no motives could have kept him from doing it before. These motives are but the excuses wherewith he quiets his filial feelings without violating his conscience. He thus effects a compromise between his religion and his affection, by *adjourning* a purpose which the one will not suffer him to execute, nor the

other to abandon. The question, "Is it not perfect conscience to quit him with this arm?" which he afterwards puts to Horatio, while relating the king's plot against his own life, proves that he had not even then overcome his moral repugnance to the deed.

Properly speaking, therefore, Hamlet lacks not force of will, as some have argued, but only force of self-will; that is, his will is strictly subjected to his reason and conscience, and is of course powerless when it comes in conflict with them; where they impede not his volitions he seems, as hath been said, all will. We are apt to estimate men's force of will according to what they do; but we ought often to estimate it according to what they do *not* do; for to hold still often requires much greater strength of will than to go ahead; and the peculiarity of this representation consists in the hero's being so placed that his will has its proper exercise not so much in acting as in thinking. In this way the working of his whole mind is rendered as anomalous as his situation; which is just what the subject demands. Moreover, in the perfect harmony of the will and the reason, force of will would naturally disappear altogether; for, in that case, the will being entirely subject to the law, nothing but the law would be visible in our conduct: and yet to preserve or restore this harmony of will and reason is undoubtedly the greatest achievement in human power. Thus the highest possible exercise of will is in renouncing itself and taking the law instead; so that, paradoxical as it may seem, he may be justly said to have most strength of will, who has, or rather *shows*, none at all. Hamlet is equal to the performance of any duty, but not to the reconciliation of

incompatible duties; and he cannot act for the simple reason, that he has equal "respect unto all" the duties of his situation. In a word, his inability is purely of a moral, not of a complexional kind; and this inability is only another name for the highest sort of power.

Hence, doubtless, as some one has remarked, Hamlet would seem greater were he not so great. In his thoughts and feelings and principles he soars so far above our ordinary standards of greatness as to dwarf himself by the distance. He who ruleth his spirit *is* greater than he who taketh a city, but he who taketh a city *seems* greater than he who ruleth his spirit. We in our littleness estimate greatness by the noise it makes: true greatness moves in harmony, false greatness in conflict, with the moral order of things; the conflict is loud, but the harmony is still. Why, Christianity when first published made infinitely less noise than the last French novel: the former came from heaven, the latter came from nowhere, or from a worse place; that has revolutionized the world, this has done and can do nothing but kill time, or rather, kill mind awhile, and then die itself. Who strives only to do what he ought is silent even in his achievements; whose only strife is to do what he can, he is noisy even in his failures: his noise indeed is a sign he is failing; if he were going to succeed he would be sure to keep still about it, because, in order to succeed, he must work in depths where the ear cannot penetrate: it is what acts on the surface that makes a noise; it is what works in the centre that does something. Who has ever heard the sun shine? who has not heard a straw-fire blaze?

“ Rightly to be great,
Is, not to stir without great argument ;
But greatly to find quarrel in a straw,
When honour 's at the stake.”

Such, it seems to me, is Hamlet's greatness, and not the less truly his because he disclaims it. Hamlet, indeed, is emphatically greater than he knows. The man that is not greater than he knows is a very small affair !

Hamlet, it is true, is continually charging the fault of his situation on himself. Herein is involved one of the finest strokes in the whole delineation. True virtue never publishes itself ; it does not even know itself : radiating from the heart through all the functions of life, its transpirations are so free and smooth and deep as to escape the ear of consciousness. Hence people are generally aware of their virtue in proportion as they have it *not*. We are apt to estimate the merit of our good deeds according to the struggles we make in doing them ; whereas, the greater our virtue the less we shall have to struggle in order to do them, and it is purely the weakness and imperfection of our virtue that makes it so hard for us to do well. Accordingly we find that he who does no duty without being goaded up to it, is conscious of much more virtue than he has ; while he who does every duty as a thing of course and a matter of delight, is unconscious of his virtue simply because he has so much of it.

Moreover, in his conflict of duties Hamlet naturally thinks he is taking the wrong one ; for the calls of the claim he meets are hushed by satisfaction, while the calls of the claim he neglects are increased by disappointment. Thus the motives which he resists out-tongue

those which he obeys, so that he hears nothing but the voice of the duty he omits. We are of course insensible of the current with which we move; but we are made sensible of the current against which we move by the very struggle it costs. In this way Hamlet comes to mistake his scruples of conscience for want of conscience, and, from his very sensitiveness of principle, tries to reason himself into a conviction of guilt. If, however, he were really guilty of what he accuses himself, he would be trying to find or make excuses wherewith to opiate his conscience. For the bad naturally try to hide their badness, the good their goodness, from themselves; for which cause the former seek narcotics, the latter stimulants, for their consciences. The good man is apt to think he has not conscience enough, because it does not trouble him; the bad man naturally thinks he has more conscience than he needs, because it troubles him all the while; which accounts for the well-known readiness of bad men to supply their neighbours with conscience. Of this sort were those men we read of, whose tenderness of conscience was such that they could not bear to take civil oaths, though they did not scruple to break those they had already taken.

And yet Hamlet "thinks meet to put an antic disposition on." This, if, indeed, it be not rather the anticipation of a real than the pre-announcement of a feigned insanity, seems to me a profound artifice of honesty. Hamlet cannot kill his uncle, and disdains to conciliate him; and apparent madness is the only practicable outlet of thoughts and feelings which he scorns to hide. Towards the king as a fratricide, a regicide and an usurper, as the thief of his father's life and crown and

queen, he feels the deepest abhorrence. The Lord Chamberlain, as a skilful but unprincipled tool of sovereignty, reckless whom, and caring only for what, he serves, Hamlet regards with the contempt which a man of noble qualities naturally feels for a man of merely useful qualities. To express his sentiments to these in his real character, would be but to defeat his purpose and endanger his life. Since, therefore, in his true character he can only express false feelings, he assumes a false character to express his true feelings. Thus his apparent mental insanity becomes the triumph of his moral sanity. Such, then, appears the true moral aspect and explanation of Hamlet's madness: it is the spontaneous effort of his mind to be true to itself; he resorts to formal hypocrisy as the only available refuge from essential hypocrisy. Moreover, Hamlet sees that in this way he can tent the king's conscience to the quick with impunity. Accordingly it is not till pierced by the shaft, that the king discovers Hamlet's aim; which discovery is a perfect demonstration of his own guilt. Thus Hamlet turns the very disturbance with which his soul is struggling into a means at once of safety to himself and of punishment to the king: the uneasy suspicions and remorse which his antics awaken in the king being at the same time proof of his guilt and revenge for his crime; and the setting a wicked man's conscience to biting and stinging him, is always a lawful and even laudable kind of revenge. Herein Hamlet shows his profound cunning, when he will stoop to cunning: he so lays his plan that the king cannot possibly detect him without betraying himself: from the nature of the case, the moment the king shows that he

suspects what Hamlet is about, that moment Hamlet knows infallibly what the king has been about.

Of all the perplexities, however, involved in this play, the question of Hamlet's madness is perhaps the hardest of solution. Whether his insanity be real or feigned, or whether it be a species of intermittent insanity, or whether it be sometimes real, sometimes feigned, are questions which, like many that arise on similar points in actual life, can never be fully and finally settled one way or the other. Aside from the ordinary impossibility of deciding precisely where sanity ends and insanity begins, there are, as there naturally must be, peculiarities in Hamlet's character and conduct, resulting from the minglings of the preternatural in his situation; which peculiarities, as they lie beyond the compass of our common experience, so they can never be reduced to any thing more than probable conjecture. If sanity consists in a certain harmony and sympathy between a man's actions and his circumstances, it must be difficult indeed to say what would be insanity in a man so circumstanced as Hamlet. Of course my own view in this matter will pass for just what it is worth.

Many of us, no doubt, have experienced in ourselves or observed in others an almost irrepressible tendency, in times of great depression, to fly off into extravagant humours and eccentricities. I have myself known people in hours of extreme despondency to throw their most intimate friends into consternation by their prodigious extravagancies; their minds being in a very paroxysm of frolic when they almost felt like hanging themselves. Such symptoms of wildness and insanity are often but the natural, though perhaps spasmodic, re-

action of the mind against the weight that oppresses it. The mind thus spontaneously becomes eccentric, in order to recover or preserve its centre ; voluntarily departs from its orbit, to escape what might else throw it from its orbit. This is especially apt to be the case with minds which, like Hamlet's, unite great intellectual power with exceeding fineness and fulness of sensibility. The truth is, almost all extreme emotions naturally express themselves by their opposites : extreme sorrow often utters itself in laughter ; extreme joy in tears : utter despair sometimes breaks out in a voice of mirth ; a wounded spirit, in gushes of humour. Hence Shakspeare, with a depth of nature which has often puzzled both readers and critics, has heightened the effect of some of his awfulest catastrophes by making the persons indulge in flashes of merriment : for there is nothing so appalling as a person laughing in distress ; it shows that the spirit is loaded to the utmost extent of its endurance. And the same thing often occurs in actual life. Sir Thomas More's wit upon the scaffold, "than the bare axe more luminous and keen," is an instance of this kind, familiar perhaps to you all. It is not to be presumed, I take it, that More's playfulness on this awful occasion sprung from merry feelings ; on the contrary, it must have sprung, one would think, from the other extreme of feeling—a man smiling and playing from excess of anguish and terror. In like manner Hamlet's mental aberrations seem to spring, not from deficiency, but from excess of intellectual strength ; the conscious, half-voluntary bendings and swayings of his faculties beneath an overload of thought, *to keep them from breaking*. Amid overpowering excitements of

his reason and his blood his intellect is neither crippled by disease nor enthralled by illusion, but distracted by conflicting duties and hurried away into antics and eccentricities. His mind being deeply disturbed, agitated to its centre, but not disorganized, those irregularities are rather a throwing off of that disturbance than a giving way to it. Goethe's celebrated illustration, therefore, though almost too beautiful not to be true, seems entirely irrelevant and inadmissible. "Here," says he, "is an oak planted in a China vase, proper to receive only the most delicate flowers; the roots strike out, and the vessel flies to pieces." If Hamlet's mind were really disorganized, broken in fragments, as this expression implies, I do not see how it could alternate, as it unquestionably does, between integrity and unsoundness; between the most exquisite harmony and the most jarring dissonance.

Now the expressions of mirth which come from extreme depression are obviously neither the reality nor the affectation of mirth. People, when overwhelmed by despair, certainly are not in a condition to *feel* merry, and they are as little in a condition to *feign* mirth; yet, though neither feeling nor feigning it, they do, nevertheless, sometimes *express* it. The truth is, such extremes naturally and spontaneously express themselves by their opposites; the very contradiction between the passion and expression best revealing the unutterable intensity of the passion. In like manner Hamlet's madness, paradoxical and contradictory as the statement may appear, is, it seems to me, neither real nor affected, but a sort of natural and spontaneous imitation of madness resulting from the successful though

convulsive efforts of an overburdened mind to brace and stay itself under the burden. The triumphs of his reason over his passion naturally express themselves in the tokens of insanity, just as the agonies of despair naturally vent themselves in flashes of merriment. It is not so correct, therefore, to say that Hamlet *puts* an antic disposition on, as that he *lets* it on; and his pre-announcement of it seems to spring rather from foresight of a contingency than from an intention to deceive. He foresees, apparently, that such eccentricities and aberrations will be the natural result of his condition; that, though he can avoid them if he will, it will require an effort to do so; that though repressible, it will not be easy, perhaps not safe, to repress them. Foreseeing, moreover, that by giving nature free course and indulging these aberrations as they rise, he can turn them to an useful purpose, he therefore determines neither to seek nor shun them, but to let them come when they will, and use them when they come.

The character of Hamlet seems designed to exemplify, among other things, the rare but not unnatural contradiction between the inward and the outward, the real and the apparent, whereby men come to seem precisely the reverse of what they are. For, as bad men are generally compelled to appear good, notwithstanding and even because they are bad, so good men are sometimes compelled to appear bad, even because they are good. Thus in Hamlet we have apparent weakness springing from real strength; apparent badness from real goodness; apparent insanity from real sanity. In like manner, his unkind treatment of Ophelia, in the famous eaves-dropping scene, appears to spring from his

exceeding tenderness of feeling. An arrangement has been made whereby Hamlet and Ophelia are to have an interview, the king and Polonius being behind the curtains meanwhile to overhear what passes between them, with a view to ascertain, if possible, the cause of his supposed insanity: which cause Polonius thinks, and the king hopes, to be disappointed love. Hamlet encounters her there: "Nymph, in thy orisons be all my sins remembered;" perfectly kind and gentle towards her. Presently, however, his deportment changes and becomes exceedingly harsh and rude. The question is, why this so sudden and violent change? Now Ophelia is here thrown into a position where she is forced to tell or act a falsehood. In her perfect innocence and artlessness, having probably never told, much less acted, a lie in her life, she is of course unable to go smoothly through the part assigned her; she falters, hesitates, becomes embarrassed, and thus betrays by her manner the very secret she is trying to hide. From this involuntary embarrassment Hamlet doubtless instantaneously perceives that something is wrong, and suspects himself to be watched; and his subsequent remarks, though addressed to Ophelia, are rather intended for those who are watching him. To clear up this difficulty on the stage, the king and Polonius are sometimes made to come forward where Hamlet can see them. This, I beg leave to say with all due deference, precludes the chief beauty of the scene, which is, that Ophelia should be so innocent as to betray by her manner, and Hamlet so quick-sighted as to detect, precisely what is going on.

But, though Hamlet's uncivil speeches on this occa-

sion be rather intended for the eaves-droppers than for Ophelia, still he cannot but know she will take them as meant for herself, and accordingly be hurt by them; so that, without other grounds than this, we cannot reconcile his conduct with the assurance, that

“Forty-thousand brothers
Could not, with all their quantity of love,
Make up his sum.”

The discovery of the trick attempted upon him may be a sufficient reason for resuming his antic disposition, but not for using unkind and uncourteous expressions to her. What, then, can be Hamlet's motive in using them? Few circumstances in the play have been so perplexing to critics as this. It seems never to have occurred to them to seek for the motives of Hamlet's conduct in the result. Now Ophelia comes out of the interview fully convinced that his mind is hopelessly wrecked. Is it not fair to presume, then, that this result is precisely what he intended? Knowing that her heart is entirely his own, and fearing the effects of his unexplainable desertion of her, he therefore wishes to detach and alienate her feelings gradually, and so prevent the danger of a too sudden and violent rupture. In a word, he treats her rudely and unkindly in order to save her. Thus we have apparent harshness springing from real tenderness; and Hamlet's conduct becomes reconcilable with his professions on the ground of its being, in the words of Lamb, “an ingenious device of love gradually to prepare her mind by affected discourtesies under the guise of insanity for the breaking up of an

attachment which he knows can never be consummated."

After all, however, it must be confessed, as was intimated in the outset, that there is a mystery about Hamlet, which baffles the utmost efforts of criticism; the deepest and subtilest analysis having hitherto proved unable to clear up the apparent inconsistencies of his character. The central principle from which these inconsistencies radiate and in which they are reconciled, lies perhaps beyond any insight less piercing than Shakspeare's. We cannot see, Hamlet himself cannot see, the why and wherefore of his being and doing thus and so; he is subject to impulses below our penetration and even below his own consciousness. We *feel* the truth and consistency of the character, but the *grounds* of this feeling reach beyond our depth; for in such matters the heart always feels much deeper than the head sees. In the words of another, "Hamlet is a being with springs of thought and feeling and action, deeper than we can search. These springs rise up from an unknown depth; a depth in which we feel and know there is an unity of being, though we cannot distinctly perceive it; so that the superficial contradictions of his character have no power to make us doubt its perfect truth." And the character undoubtedly cleaves to us the closer for that, while it includes much of our own consciousness, it also reflects the mystery of our own being. We can neither see through Hamlet nor get away from him, and the same is the case with ourselves; indeed, this is about all that we know of ourselves.

The idea of Hamlet which I have been trying to unfold, is conscious plenitude of intellect united with ex-

ceeding fineness and fulness of sensibility and guided by a predominant sentiment of moral rectitude. In spite of himself, his mind is a perennial spring of "thoughts that wander through eternity;" he is perpetually losing the present in the eternal, the particular in the universal, as genius is apt to do; for genius is, in some sort, intuition of universal truth. His mind, however, is by no means in a healthy state; indeed, no healthy mind could well retain its health in his circumstances. When all was joyous and promising before him, he had sufficient resources without, and his faculties were genially occupied with external objects; but amid his later trials and perplexities he is forced to seek within himself resources which the world cannot furnish, and his faculties are thrown back upon themselves. Thus his great genius becomes intensely self-conscious, and introspection settles into a sort of chronic disease:

" By abstruse research to steal
From his own nature all the natural man—
This was his sole resource, his only plan;
Till that which suits a part infects the whole,
And now is grown the very habit of his soul."

It is in this morbid consciousness of his own powers that he exclaims: "What a piece of work is a man! How noble in reason, how infinite in faculties! in form and moving how express and admirable! in action how like an angel, in apprehension how like a god!" Haunted with a sense of the supernatural in his experience; persecuted with duties which he can neither forget nor perform; with all the natural issues of his being closed up, so that he can neither act nor let it alone; and mis-

taking his outward difficulties for inward deficiency; his mind of course becomes abstracted from surrounding objects, and absorbed in itself; he can do nothing but think, and think, and "eat his own heart;" his self-contemplation causing him to marvel the more at his inactivity, and his inactivity plunging him still deeper in self-contemplation.

And perhaps his consciousness of "genius given and knowledge won in vain," is one source of his overwrought distress. Educated with the noble prospect and inspired with the noble ambition of blessing others, every thing he now meets but stings him with remembrance of the precious opportunity whereof another's crimes have deprived him. In his calmer moments, when his energies are not engrossed in controlling his emotions, he revels amid the very regalities of poetry and philosophy; his mind, rich with the spoils of nature and of art, smiles forth its treasures with the gentleness of a child and the composure of a god; unbending itself in the labours of a giant! In the happiness of youthful confidence his genius has plucked the flowers which carpet the fields of antiquity, to enwreath the brows of Truth, its modest and beautiful bride; and the melodies of Eden seem stealing upon us when, escaping for a moment from the tempest which hath overtaken him, he unclasps to the ear of friendship the record of his intellectual triumphs.

POLONIUS.

POLONIUS is in nearly all respects the antithesis of Hamlet, though Hamlet doubtless includes him as the

heavens include the earth. He is a sort of political ossification or petrification, whose soul, if he ever had one, has got wholly absorbed in his understanding. A man of but one method, that of intrigue, and of but one motive, that of interest ; wholly given up to the arts of management ; with his fingers always itching to pull the wires of some intricate plot ; and without any sense or perception of the fitness of times and occasions ;* he is called to act in a matter where such arts and methods are especially inappropriate and unavailing, and therefore he only succeeds of course in overreaching and circumventing himself. In this fanaticism of intrigue surviving the powers from which it originally sprung lies the explanation, not only of his character, but of a class of characters which is as immortal as human folly. Thus in Polonius we have the type of a politician in his dotage ; and all his follies and blunders arise from his undertaking to act the politician where he is especially required to be a man. This, I am aware, is making him out a caricature rather than a character, for a man of but one motive or one feature is a caricature ; nevertheless it is such a caricature as we occasionally meet with in actual life.

True to the principles and practices of his order, Polonius studies and deals with men, not to make them wiser or better, but only to make himself better off out of them ; and has therefore acquired in the greatest perfection and greatest abundance just such a knowledge of human nature as degrades himself and enables him to degrade others ;—the same knowledge, for all the world, that politicians now-a-days seek,—and get, and use too. His very trade, indeed, brings him to know

men only in conditions where the springs and causes of their actions lie out of themselves. For there is a mechanical as well as a dynamical part in our nature ; and few things are more common than for men to get so engrossed in one of these parts as to lose sight of the other : as, on the one hand, certain physicians, absorbed in the study of our material frame, have come to the conclusion that we had no souls ; and, on the other hand, certain metaphysicians, absorbed in studying our spiritual being, have concluded we had no bodies. In certain spheres of action, in the court, the cabinet, the counting-room and the exchange, among the arts, the games, the interests and the ambitions of life, men are but a sort of machines, to be moved by certain outward, definite, tangible forces ; dispose those forces after a certain manner, and you can pretty nearly calculate the results : but in certain other spheres of action, at the fireside and the altar, where the affections, the religions, the dynamics of our nature, are called into play,—here men are something far better and nobler than machines ; and as they are moved by certain inward, vital, self-determining powers, so we cannot possibly anticipate or control their movements.

Now it is only in the former spheres of life that Polonius has any real acquaintance with men. Of those innate and original springs of action, which originate and shape the movements of men in spheres of disinterestedness, he has no insight or even conception. Always looking through his politician spectacles, he sees men only where and when and so far as they are machines, capable of being played into a given set of motions by a given set of motives ; and a long course of observa-

tion and experiment has taught him how to adjust and apply, with wonderful precision, the forces and influences which will set them a-going as he desires. From studying nothing but the mechanics of human nature, he has come to regard men as nothing but machines ; for what is itself divine is not to be discerned but by divine faculties ; and he presumes men to be nothing but accountants, because, forsooth, he has none but counting-house faculties to view them with.

In matters of calculation, therefore, Polonius is a sage ; in matters of sentiment and imagination he is a dunce. He always succeeds in arts of policy because he never tries to rise above them ; like the demagogue who leads the people by first watching their course, and then adroitly rushing ahead of them ; a thing that requires but long legs, a short head, and little or no heart. Polonius, accordingly, has made success his test of merit, and success has made him self-conceited. For such is apt to be the case with artful, intriguing men : generally succeeding, as the world counts success, they naturally estimate merit by success, and thus become as conceited as they are successful. They deserve to be conceited !

From books, also, Polonius has gleaned maxims, but not gained development ; can repeat, but not reproduce, their contents ; equips, not feeds his mind out of them ; uses them, in short, not as spectacles to read nature with, but only as blinds or goggles to protect his own eyes with. He has therefore made books his idols, and books have made him pedantic. For he is a conceited old pedant. An exceedingly practical man, he is too fond of the dirt to be in any danger of getting up into the

clouds. Craving truth only for the stomach's sake, of course he always has food enough, and his understanding is too eupeptic to think of living by faith; he believes in living on realities: there is no romance about him: no indeed; he cultivates solider things than that!

To such a mind, or rather, half-mind, the character of Hamlet must needs be a profound enigma. It takes a whole man to know such a being as Hamlet; and Polonius is but the attic story of a man! Of course he cannot find a heart or a soul in Hamlet, because he has none himself to find them with: for it always takes a heart to find a heart, a soul to find a soul; those who have them not always think, and deserve to think, that others are without them. As, in Polonius's mind, the calculative faculties have eaten out the perceptive faculties, so of course his premises are seldom right and his inferences seldom wrong. Assuming Hamlet to be thus and thus, he reasons and acts most admirably in regard to him; but the fact is, he has no eye for the true premises of the case; he cannot *see* Hamlet, cannot understand him: and, his premises being wrong, the very correctness of his logic makes him seem but the more ridiculous.

Wherefore, knowing the prince can hope to make nothing by marrying his daughter, he cannot conceive why he should woo her, unless from dishonourable intentions. And he falls into a similar mistake in regard to Ophelia. He thinks she is in danger from Hamlet's addresses to her, that she will fall a victim to some inhuman arts, because he is insensible to her real power: to him she appears all weakness and exposure, because he has no eye to discern her true strength. But, to such

a man as Hamlet, a man of heart, of soul, of honour, of religion, of manhood, she is the concentration of whatever is most powerful and most formidable : her virgin innocence, her gentleness, her maiden honour, her sweet, sacred defencelessness, "create an awe about her as a guard angelic placed ;" all heaven, in short, is set for the protection of such a being ; but heaven, alas ! is no protection against a brute, much less, against a selfish, heartless, soulless man !

Coleridge has very happily remarked, that "good terrestrial charts can be constructed only by celestial observations." As it is only by the aid of the stars that men can direct their course securely and profitably over the earth, so some men observe the stars only for the sake of that profit and security ; they look upwards, not indeed to learn what is above them, but only that they may the better avail themselves of what is around or beneath them. Such appears to be the case with Polonius in the few precepts with which he accompanies the farewell blessing upon Laertes. Coming from another man, these precepts, it must be confessed, would seem the very perfection of prudential morality, containing here and there a trace of manly, generous sentiment : coming from Polonius, they seem but the extraction and quintessence of Chesterfieldism, of which the first and great commandment is, act and speak to conceal, not to express thy thoughts, and avoid to do any thing that may injure thyself ; for on this commandment undoubtedly hang all the law and the prophets of his morality : and if in this brief abstract of policy he sprinkles a few elements of manly honour and generosity, it is only to make the compound more palatable to a young mind, that has

not so far desiccated itself of heart and soul as to take up with mere policy. The precept,

"To thine own self be true,
And it must follow, as the night the day,
Thou canst not then be false to any man,"

means in his mouth, be true to thine own interest, and but expresses the common notion that injustice to others is injurious to one's self. This precept, indeed, has sometimes been urged as redeeming the author from that utter baseness and selfishness which the rest of his conduct so plainly indicates: but to me it seems rather to confirm the view I have taken of him; for it must obviously mean one of two things: either, be true to thine own heart, which is perhaps the best morality; or, be true to thine own interest, which is the worst morality: and all the rest of the character seems to warrant, if not to require, the latter construction. What does such a man naturally mean by self? his heart? he don't know that he has one: perhaps he has not; interest being all the heart he has or deserves to have. It has been suggested that Polonius here forgets himself, and, speaking from memory, unwittingly drops a better sentiment than he is aware of. To which I can only reply, such men as he are seldom guilty of any thing so good as forgetting themselves; indeed, their chief misery and meanness is, that they seldom think of any thing but themselves.

Polonius would doubtless have his son strain at a gnat of indiscretion, and swallow a camel of insincerity; sit up nights to make himself a gentleman, but take no pains to make himself a man. Of course I mean a

fashionable gentleman ; for a true gentleman is, I take it, the finest piece of work that God has yet shown us—except a true lady. Polonius aims, not to plant high principles, nor kindle noble passions, but only to lodge shrewd practical maxims in his son. The whole gist of his instructions to Laertes is, to study and discipline all spontaneousness out of himself ; and for those involuntary and unconscious transpirations of character, which reveal that one has a heart, though perhaps with some flaws in it, he would leave no room whatever. In his view “the dictates of an inward sense whose voice outweighs the world,” are but bugbears to frighten children withal ; and a virtue which cannot prate about itself, which, moved by secret, vital forces, goes so smoothly and sweetly and silently as not to hear itself, or be conscious of its workings, is not to be thought of or trusted in, much less sought after or approved. In a word, his morality and religion spring altogether from the understanding, not from the conscience nor the heart ; and therefore are in reality and in effect but two chapters of political economy, one for this world, and one for the next.

And yet Polonius is a great man in his way ; many of the world’s favourites are but diminutives of him ; several modern politicians might, I suspect, be cut out of him. He has the lower faculties, the calculative, in the highest degree ; the higher faculties, the imaginative, he has not at all. He is virtuous inasmuch as he keeps below vice, (for there is a place down there and some people in it ;) is honest, because he thinks honesty to be the best policy,—a maxim which, by the way, is far from being universally true : for honesty sometimes

carries people to the stake, (queer policy that !) and perhaps it would carry more of us to the stake, if we had it ; if it did not carry us to the stake, it might carry us to poverty, and that, some people think, is the next thing to the stake. Polonius, indeed, is free alike from principle and from passion, so that he goes straight ahead merely from want of susceptibilities for temptation to lay hold of, and keeps himself transparent, because he has got so crystallized that no dust can stick to him.

Shakspeare's matchless skill in revealing a character through its most characteristic transpirations is nowhere more finely displayed than in the instructions Polonius gives his servant, Reynaldo, for detecting the habits and practices of his absent son. In framing plans to "get at truth, though it lie hid within the centre;" how, "with the bait of falsehood he may take the carp of truth;" and how, "of wisdom and of reach, with wind-laces and with assays of bias," he may "by indirections find directions out;" here the old politician is perfectly at home ; his mind seems to revel in the mysteries of wire-pulling and trap-setting ; and schemes fly together in his head and trot out of his mouth as if they could not help it. In Hamlet, however, he finds an impracticable subject ; here all his strategy and sagacity are effectually nonplussed ; and the trap with which he essays to catch the truth only springs on himself. The mere torch of policy, nature, or Hamlet who is an embodiment of nature, blows him out, so that he rays out nothing but darkness and smoke whenever he attempts to throw light on the prince. The sport of circumstances, it was only by a change of circumstances that Hamlet came to know him. Once the honoured minister of his

royal father, now the despised tool of his father's murderer, Hamlet sees in him only a mean and supple time-server, ready at any time to "crook the pregnant hinges of the knee where thrift may follow fawning;" and the ease with which he baffles and puzzles and plagues the old fox, shows how much craftier one *can* be who scorns craft, than one who courts it.

Habits of intrigue having extinguished in Polonius the powers of insight and adaptation to circumstances, he of course discerns not the unfitness of his usual methods to the new exigency; while at the same time his faith in the craft which he has hitherto found so successful betrays him into the most overweening assurance. Hence, also, that singular but most characteristic specimen of unconscious grannyism, namely, his pedantic, unseasonable and impertinent trifling and dallying with artful forms and turns of thought and speech amidst the most serious business, though conceiving and swearing the while that he is using no art at all; where, mindless of the occasion, and absorbed in his frivolous fancies, he appears not unlike a certain learned dunce who "could speak no sense in several languages;" and shows what a tedious old fool he is the moment he leaves to "hunt the train of policy," and forsakes the habitual routine of intrigue and management. Superannuated politicians, indeed, like Polonius, seldom appear wise but in proportion as they fall back upon the resources of memory; for out of these resources, the ashes, so to speak, of long extinct faculties, they may seem wise after the fountains of wisdom are dried up within them; as a man who *has lost* his sight may seem to distinguish colours perfectly so long as he does not undertake to speak of

the colours about him. On the whole, Polonius is a fine exemplification of the truth, that while wisdom grows more bright and beautiful as it waxes older, aged cunning relapses into garrulous dotage ; and that amid the decays of sense nothing can retain the soul in its dignity but a faith in the truth, and a child-like simplicity of heart which reposes meekly and gently upon a wisdom above its own.

There is one relation, nowever, in which, from whatsoever motives, Polonius wishes to do his entire duty. He sincerely aims and endeavours to be a good father, and evidently has the welfare, or rather, the interest of his children truly at heart. But here, as elsewhere, the politician is visibly uppermost, perverting his endeavours and thwarting his aims ; for Ophelia seems to have grown up what she is rather in spite of her father's instructions than in consequence of them. The truth is, he has practised the arts of intrigue until they have grown into second nature ; the craft which he adopted as his servant has become his master ; so that in spite of himself the wily magician looks out upon us through the face of the father. It is thus that a principle of action, when once taken home to the bosom, insinuates itself throughout the character, shaping and colouring the whole life into its likeness. The mean and wicked arts which we call in as friends and auxiliaries generally remain as our conquerors and lords ; and Satan, invited to a corner of the mind, seldom fails to usurp the whole.

OPHELIA.

Of all Shakspeare's heroines the impression of Ophelia is perhaps the most difficult of analysis, partly because she is so intensely real, and partly because she is so undeveloped. A perfect rose-bud of womanhood, just ready to burst into development from its own fulness, we feel its riches in the promise, but cannot distinguish the peculiarities that are to characterize the flower. Nipt, too, on the promise of the blossom, the bud perishes "before its buttons be disclosed," leaving us nothing but smiles for its beauty and tears for its fate.

Ophelia is brought forward but little in the play, and yet the whole play seems pervaded with her presence. Her very absence reveals her; her very silence utters her; we think of her the more for that we miss her society. We see her and Hamlet together scarcely any, yet we can hardly separate them in our thoughts. Of their sweet hours of courtship, when Ophelia "sucked the honey of his music vows," we hear nothing whatever; yet we know them all: we read their whole history in the impression they have left upon her, subduing her entire being, heart, soul and sense, to the sweet sovereignty of love. Perhaps the reason why Ophelia, though seen so little in the play, affects us so deeply and constantly is, that those about her owe their best development to her influence. Amid the court circle she is like a voice of music issuing from the bosom of chaos: Whatever harmony comes from Polonius and the queen, is of her eliciting; all that redeems them from our hatred or scorn, is of her inspiring: Laertes is interest-

ing to us chiefly for the interest he takes in his sister ; he had little hold on our regard but for the feelings she has awakened within him : Of Hamlet's soul, too, she is the sunrise and the morning hymn, bathing in brightness the birth of a day so awful in its beauty and so pitiable in its woe. The soul of innocence and gentleness, wisdom seems to radiate from her insensibly, as fragrance is exhaled from flowers. It is in such forms that Heaven most frequently visits us.

Ophelia's situation very much resembles that of Imogen ; their characters are in perfect contrast. Both appear amidst the corruptions of a wicked court : Ophelia escapes them by insensibility to their presence ; Imogen by firm, steady resistance : The former is unassailable in her innocence ; the latter is unconquerable in her strength : Ignorance protects Ophelia ; knowledge protects Imogen : The conception of vice has hardly found its way into Ophelia's mind ; in Imogen the daily perception of vice has but called forth the power to repel it : Ophelia dreams not but she is surrounded by angels ; Imogen knows she is surrounded by devils : knowledge of her situation would ruin the former ; ignorance of her situation would ruin the latter. Ophelia's utter ignorance of her father's character begets perfect confidence in him, and therefore requires implicit obedience to his orders ; Imogen's perfect knowledge of her father's character begets utter distrust of him, and therefore requires unyielding resistance to his orders. In Ophelia again, as in Desdemona, the comparative want of intelligence, or rather, of intellectuality, is never felt as a deficiency. She fills up the idea of excellence just as completely as if she were all

intellect. In the rounded harmony of her character we miss not the absent elements, because there is no vacancy left for them to supply ; and high intellect would rather strike us as a superfluity than as a supplement ; its voice would rather drown than complete the harmony of the other tones.

Ophelia is exhibited in the utmost ripeness and mellowness, both of soul and of sense, to impressions from without. With her susceptibilities just opening to external objects, her thoughts are so completely engrossed with those objects as to leave no room for self-contemplation. This exceeding impressibility is the source at once of her beauty and her danger. From the lips and eyes of Hamlet she has drunk in assurances of his love, but she has never heard the voice of her own ; and she knows not how full her heart is of Hamlet, because she has not a single thought or feeling there at strife with him : the current of her feelings runs so deep that it does not admit of tumult enough to make her conscious of them. In the words of Mrs. Jameson, " She is far more conscious of being loved than of loving, and yet loving in the depth of her young heart far more than she is loved." For it is a singular fact, that though Hamlet gives many disclosures, and Ophelia gives only concealments, many have doubted the reality of his love, while no one has ever thought of doubting the reality of hers.

Critics generally have construed Ophelia's silence respecting her own passion into a wish to hide it from others ; but the truth is, she seems not to be aware of it herself ; and she unconsciously betrays it in the modest reluctance with which she yields up the secret of Ham-

let's addresses to her. The extorted confession of what she has received reveals how much she has given : the soft movements of her bosom are made the plainer by the delicate lawn of silence thrown over it. To the warnings of her brother and the orders of her father she promises and intends implicit obedience, ignorant herself of the fearful truth, and yet betraying it to us by this very ignorance, that those warnings and orders have come too late. Alas ! she knows not that the love which she thus consents to shut out of her heart has already entwined itself inextricably with the innermost thread of her life. Even when despair is wringing and crushing her innocent young soul into an utter wreck she seems not to know the source of her affliction ; and the dreadful truth comes forth only when her sweet mind which, stringed and tuned in heaven, once breathed such enchanting harmony, lies broken in fragments before us, and the secrets of her maiden heart are hovering on her soul-deserted tongue.

One of the bitterest ingredients in poor Ophelia's cup of sorrow, is the belief that by her repulse of Hamlet she has scared away the music of his mind ; and when, forgetting the wounds with which her own pure spirit is bleeding, over the heart-rending spectacle of that "unmatched form and feature of blown youth, blasted with ecstasy," she meets his fatal, "I loved you not," with the despairing sigh, "I was the more deceived," we see that she feels not the sundering of the ties that bind her sweetly-tempered faculties in harmony. The singing of this innocent sweet bird has but betrayed her to the hunter's aim ; and she feels not the fatal shot because it strikes to the very source of her spirit's life.

And yet we blame not Hamlet, for he is himself but a victim of the same relentless, inexorable power which is spreading its ravages through him over another life as pure and heavenly as his own. Standing on the verge of an abyss which he sees is yawning to engulf himself, his very effort to frighten her back from it, only hurries her in before him. To snatch a jewel from Mrs. Jameson's casket, "he knows he can neither marry her nor reveal to her the terrific influences which have changed the whole current of his life and purposes; and in his agony he overacts the painful part with which he has tasked himself; like the judge of Athens who, engrossed with graver matters, flung from him the little bird which had sought refuge in his bosom with such violence that he unwittingly killed it."

Ophelia's insanity absolutely exhausts the fountains of human pity. The breaking of her virgin heart lets loose the secrets which have hitherto enriched it, and their escape reveals the utter ruin of their once sweet dwelling-place. It is one of those pictures surcharged with unuttered and unutterable woe, over which the mind can only brood in silent sympathy and awe; which Heaven alone has a heart adequately to pity, and a hand effectually to heal. Its pathos were too much for our hearts to bear but for the sweet incense that rises from her crushed spirit, as "she turns thought and affliction, passion, hell itself, to favour and to prettiness." The victim of crimes in which she has no share but as a sufferer, we hail with joy the event which snatches her from the rack of this world; and in our speechless pity for such helpless innocence we seek the sure consolations of hope in the arms of religious faith. In the

death of this gentle creature there is a divine depth of sorrow which strikes expression dumb. In their solemn playfulness the songs with which she chants, as it were, her own burial service, are like smiles gushing from the very heart of woe. Over this picture so awful in its beauty, I can but repeat the sighs of its most gifted commentator: "Ophelia! poor Ophelia! O, far too soft, too good, too fair, to be cast among the briers of this working-day world, and fall and bleed upon the thorns of life. What shall be said of her! for eloquence is mute before her. So exquisitely delicate is her character it seems as if a touch would profane it; so sanctified in our thoughts by the last and worst of human woes, that we dare not consider it too deeply. Her love, which she never once confesses, is like a secret which we have stolen from her, and which ought to die upon our hearts as it dies on our own. Her sorrow asks not words but tears: and from the spectacle of her insanity we feel inclined to turn away, and veil our eyes in reverential pity and too painful sympathy."

THE QUEEN.

THE Queen's affection for this lovely being is one of those unexpected strokes of character so frequent in Shakspeare, which surprise us into reflection by their very naturalness. Mrs. Jameson compares it to the nightingales of Sophocles singing in the groves of the Furies. That Ophelia should disclose a vein of goodness in the wicked Queen, was necessary perhaps to keep us both from underrating the influence of the one,

and from overrating the wickedness of the other. The love, too, which she thus awakens in one so depraved goes to prevent the pity which her condition moves from lessening the respect which her character deserves. It tells us that Ophelia's helplessness springs from innocence, not from weakness, and thus serves at once to heighten our impression in favour of her, and to soften our impression against the Queen. Besides, the good which Ophelia thus does affords some compensation to our minds for the evil which she suffers, and tends to deepen and prolong our pity by calling in other feelings to its relief and support.

Almost any other author would have depicted Gertrude without a single alleviating trait in her character. Beaumont and Fletcher would probably have made her simply frightful or loathsome, capable of exciting no feeling but disgust or abhorrence; if, indeed, in her monstrous depravity she had not rather failed to excite any feeling whatsoever. From their anxiety to produce effect in such delineations most authors would strike so hard and so often as to stun the feelings they wished to arouse. Shakspeare, with far more effect as well as far more truth, exhibits her with that mixture of good and bad which neither disarms censure nor precludes pity. Herself dragged along in the terrible train of consequences which her own guilt had a hand in starting, she is hurried away into the same dreadful abyss along with those whom she loves and against whom she has sinned. In her tenderness towards Hamlet and Ophelia we recognize the virtues of the mother without palliating in the least the guilt of the wife; while the crime in which she is an accomplice almost disappears in the crimes of

which she is the victim. Corrupted by the seductions which swarm about her station, her criminal passions blind her to the designs of her wicked but wily associate ; and she stops not to consider the nature of her conduct, until its fearful results come in to stab her affections and murder her peace.

CONCLUDING REMARKS.

To speak of this play as a whole, is a task which I dare not attempt. Nearly all the events of the play seem the work of an inscrutable Providence, or rather they *are* the work of an inscrutable Providence, and *seem* the work of an inexorable destiny. The plan of the drama seems to be, to represent persons acting without any plan ; in the words of Goethe, "the hero is without any plan, but the play itself is full of plan." The characters, accordingly, are, for most part, but the victims of what is done and the authors of what is said. The play forms a complete class by itself ; it is emphatically a tragedy of thought ; and of all Shakspeare's this undoubtedly combines the greatest strength and widest diversity of faculties. Sweeping round the whole circle of human thought and passion, its alternations of amazement and terror ; of lust and ambition and remorse ; of hope and love and friendship and anguish and madness and despair ; of wit and humour and pathos and poetry and philosophy ; now congealing the blood with horror, now melting the heart with pity, now launching the mind into eternity, now shaking the soul to its centre with thoughts too deep for mortal reach,

now startling conscience from her lonely seat with supernatural visitings ;—it unfolds a world of truth and beauty and sublimity, which our thoughts may indeed aspire to traverse, but which our tongues must despair to utter.

Of its manifold excellencies a few of the less obvious only need be mentioned. For picturesque effect the platform scenes have nowhere been surpassed. The chills of a northern winter midnight seem creeping over us as the heart-sick sentinels pass before us, and, steeped in moonlight and drowsiness, exchange their meeting and parting salutations. The train of thoughts and sentiments, which rises in their minds, is just such as the anticipation of preternatural visions would be likely to inspire. As the bitter cold stupefies their senses, an indescribable feeling of dread and awe steals over them, preparing the mind to realize its own superstitious imaginings. The feeling one has in reading these scenes is not unlike that of a child passing a graveyard by moonlight. Out of the dim and drowsy moonbeams apprehension creates its own confirmations ; our fancies embody themselves in the facts around us ; our fears give shape to outward objects, while those objects give outwardness to our fears. The heterogeneous elements which are brought together in the graveyard scene, with its strange mixture of songs and witticisms and dead men's bones, and its still stranger transitions of the grave, the sprightly, the meditative, the solemn, the playful and the grotesque, make it one of the most wonderful yet most natural scenes the poet has given us. Of various other scenes the excellencies are too obvious to need remark. The overpowering intensity

of interest in the miniature scene, with its Niagara of thoughts and images and emotions, can have escaped no mind that has not escaped it.

The catastrophe of this play is a frightful abyss of moral confusion over which the mind shudders with horror and awe. As we gaze into its dark chaotic bosom, where the guilty and the guiltless have been relentlessly swept away and overwhelmed in indistinguishable ruin, as if by some furious tornado of destiny, our thoughts, affrighted at the awful confusion before us, fly for refuge to the heaven above us. Most truly hath a wise man said, in view of this terrible catastrophe, "It is the tendency of crime to spread its evils over innocence, as it is of virtue to spread its blessings over many who deserve them not ; while, frequently, the author of the one or of the other is not punished or rewarded at all." But there is a heaven above ; and though

"In the corrupted currents of this world,
Offence's gilded hand may shove by justice ;
And oft 'tis seen, the wicked prize itself
Buys out the law ; yet 'tis not so above :
There is no shuffling, there the action lies
In its true nature ; and we ourselves compell'd,
Even to the teeth and forehead of our faults,
To give in evidence."

LECTURE XII.

MACBETH.—INTRODUCTORY REMARKS.

THE celebrated William Hunter, while lecturing on the process of digestion, after reviewing the various theories on the subject, is said to have remarked, that after all a stomach was a stomach; and that digestion was the result, not of a chemical nor of a mechanical process, but simply of a digestive process: and the still more celebrated John Hunter in a similar spirit took the ground, that the phenomena of organic nature were referable to an unexplained and unexplainable principle, called the principle of life. These positions, assuredly, are as much more philosophical as they are less difficult than the theories they are designed to supersede. There is often more of wisdom in knowing how to stop, than in knowing how to proceed, in our investigations.

Modern science has probably been more vitiated by attempts to trace all the phenomena of nature up to one principle, and all the phenomena of mind up to one faculty, than by all other causes put together. Metaphysicians, for example, endeavouring to account for all our ideas by the understanding, have ended in materialism: moralists, undertaking to explain all our moral sentiments by the understanding, have ended in expediency: theologians, undertaking to teach religion altogether

through the understanding, have ended in orthodoxism : critics, endeavouring to account for our perceptions of beauty by the understanding, have ended in utility : in like manner, naturalists, attempting to explain the phenomena of animal and vegetable life by a common principle, have ended in mechanism. Such are some of the evils resulting to science from too great a rage for simplification. One of the great faults in modern teaching is the trying to give and get a knowledge of every thing through the understanding. In attempting to teach or to learn through one faculty what is addressed to another faculty, we are in danger of spoiling both the mind studying and the subject studied. The man in whom reverence is not developed of course finds no sacredness anywhere, because he has no eye to find it with ; and all attempts to give him a knowledge of it through the understanding will but tend to convince him that no such thing exists. The ear alone cannot possibly distinguish the colour of scarlet from the sound of a trumpet ; neither can the mere understanding distinguish virtue from utility, nor duty from expediency. By the time we have got the nature of beauty or virtue or religion fully explained to the understanding, there ceases to be any such thing as beauty or virtue or religion. The fact is, these things all require special developments, and cannot possibly be understood by the same faculty to which political economy is addressed, until they are themselves turned into political economy.

Some persons can see surface and hear noise, but cannot distinguish colours or sounds, and therefore cannot see painting or hear music. We say such people have eyes, but no eye for painting—ears, but no ear for

music ; that is, they lack the inward senses to which painting and music are respectively addressed. On the same principle some one has said, a taste for Shakspeare involves the development of a special sense ; and Wordsworth tells us,

“ He who feels contempt
For any living thing, *hath faculties*
Which he has never used ;”

and Coleridge has remarked, that “ every great original author, in so far as he is truly original, has to call forth the power to understand and create the taste to enjoy him :” for his originality lies in the very fact, that he not merely exercises what is already developed, but requires and effects a new development for himself. It is a general truth, indeed, that what we seem to see around us is, in some sense, but a reflection more or less distinct, of what is within us :

“ We can receive but what we give,
And in our life alone does nature live.”

The rainbow of course spans the heavens in vain for the soul that lacks an eye ; the sweetest music is but noise to the soul that has no ear. Without the inward power of love no outward thing has loveliness for us ; and of him who has no primrose smiling at his heart, we may truly say,

“ The primrose on the river’s brim
A yellow primrose is to him,
And it is nothing more.”

On the other hand, the beauty of creation shines out in

perpetual apocalypse to every soul whose inward springs of beauty have been opened. Thus our outward discoveries naturally correspond to our inward developments; and it is because some people use nothing but their eyes that they really see so little. Prompted, perhaps, by the dim half-awakened instincts of their better nature, they are often looking with their eyes into the distant for what the eye can nowhere discover, but what the proper use of their higher faculties would at once disclose in their most immediate vicinity.

Much ingenuity has been displayed by critics, in endeavouring to account for the pleasure we derive from works of art. Now, notwithstanding the various theories on this subject, I am inclined to think, in the spirit of Dr. Hunter's philosophy, that beauty is beauty, virtue is virtue, religion is religion, and art is art; that they are respectively addressed to certain distinct correlative principles within us; and that all attempts to explain our perception of them or our interest in them by the mere understanding, can only succeed by spoiling them, or by turning them into something else. In other words, the appreciation of works of art involves the development of special faculties, and cannot be satisfactorily accounted for by the faculties employed in appreciating other objects.

It is universally allowed, that unless a given performance yield the genuine student an overbalance of pleasure, it is not entitled to be called a work of art. All our susceptibilities find pleasure in the attainment of their proper objects. Not that pleasure is the end of the susceptibility, but only an accompaniment inseparable from the attainment of that end; as pleasure springs from

the meeting of appetite with its appropriate food, so that if any thing purporting to be food bring no pleasure to the taste, we infer at once that it is no food : the object does not correspond to the appetite, and therefore is not the thing required. In like manner, unless the perception of an alleged work of art bring an overbalance of pleasure, it is not a true work of art. The susceptibility of art does not find in such a work its corresponding object. Here pleasure is not the end of the work, but only a test whether the work be genuine or not ; so that the absence of pleasure from its contemplation invalidates its pretensions.

Again : It is universally allowed that a work of art, to be genuine, must, when properly studied, produce the illusion of reality. Art, in all its forms, becomes perfect only when and so far as it ceases to seem art : the painting or music or statue which, when rightly viewed, seems to be such, is not genuine, but only a collection of colours or a succession of sounds or a block of marble. And yet it is a well-known fact, that in the world of art many things afford great pleasure, which in the actual world would give unmixed pain. The difficulty, then, is, that under the illusion of reality we enjoy things which in the actual occurrence would cause us great distress. To obviate this difficulty, some have tried to account for the interest we take in works of art by the principle of curiosity. But the truth is, the legitimate interest of such works increases as their novelty wears off, so that they really become more interesting as they cease to excite curiosity. The man who does not enjoy Shakspeare's plays much more the fiftieth time reading

than the first, has no right appreciation of them as works of art.

Once more : Not only must a work of art, to be genuine, afford an overbalance of pleasure, but it is justifiable in exciting unpleasant emotions only on condition that it afford more pleasure so than would otherwise be practicable. Nay, such a work, by general concession, rises in excellence in proportion as it gives us pleasure in what, if actually seen, would give us pain : the very triumph of art consists in making the representation delightful according as the actual occurrence would be painful. A true work of art, then, it seems to me, affects us neither as the unreal, for then it would not interest us, nor as the actual, for then it might pain us, but simply as the ideal ; that is, *as always being but never occurring*. The illusion of art, therefore, implies neither positive belief nor positive disbelief, but a simple suspension of both in pure emotion and contemplation ; a calm repose of the mind in a sufficient and suitable object. Perhaps it should be remarked, by the way, that the proper antithesis of the ideal is not the real, but the actual. The ideal, indeed, is even more real than the actual, inasmuch as the former exists for all times and places, whereas the latter can only have a local and temporary existence. This difference is exemplified and recognized in historical and individual portraits, which a practised eye readily distinguishes, though it may never have seen any thing resembling either. An individual portrait is not, properly speaking, a work of art, but only a copy from actual life, and interesting only for the sake of the original. But the interest of an ideal or historical portrait is of an altogether differ-

ent sort, and is as universal as the sense for art, because its original is everywhere, or rather, is simply an idea. In other words, the original of every work of art is in the mind itself; and it is in developing it there that the work produces its legitimate effect.

A work of art, then, depends, for its appropriate interest, on our susceptibility of the ideal; and to explain that interest by any more general susceptibility seems just about as unphilosophical as to explain the process of digestion by chemistry or mechanism. Art, therefore, like virtue and religion, is its own end, and to inquire for its utility, as that word is generally used, were not unlike inquiring for the utility of a God. But the right appreciation of art as an end involves the development of a special sense—a sense corresponding neither to the unreal nor to the actual, but to the ideal, as before explained. It was probably the want of this sense that caused Macaulay to pronounce poetry a species of madness. He but spoke then, as he frequently speaks, in the spirit of that detestable philosophy, or rather, want of philosophy, which assumes every one to be out of his senses who takes an interest in any thing above or beyond sense. He seems to regard art very much as Iago regards virtue; that is, he values it only as a means; and while he is unwilling to forego its incidental results, the thing itself that produces them seems to him a perfect absurdity. He therefore calls poetry a divine madness, and Iago calls virtue a blessed figs-end; and there is just about as much wisdom, I suspect, in the one expression as in the other.

Such, then, is the best explanation I can give of the fact, that many things which, in the actual world, would

pain us, in the world of art please us only because and so far as they produce the illusion of reality. Art does not speak to more general faculties, but calls forth a faculty for itself. The mind thus unfolds a new sense, a new inlet for truth and beauty. On the other hand, to create or reveal an ideal world for the use and occupancy of the soul, is the mission of art. Accordingly we find among all nations, that at a certain stage of culture art is the spontaneous out-growth of the national mind. If it be said that on this ground a sense for art is useless, the answer is, it may be useless to us as economists, but not as men; and if it were, the fault would lie with Him who gave the susceptibility, not with those who develope and exercise it. I have known men who discovered nothing in nature but a collection of physical aptitudes; who valued creation only as a sort of huge spinning-jenny, to twist out fortunes and interests with; and who would sneer at the idea of looking at nature through any other than economical faculties. Of course such men need no special sense to view either nature or art with; the faculties employed in the counting-room or on the plantation are all they have any use for; the only question with them in regard to any spot of nature is, whether it will produce any corn?—just as though nature were made for nothing but a corn-field. Undoubtedly such men have stomachs: whether they have any souls, is another question. Religion, too, like art or like nature, as a means is useful to us as economists, and in this view of course requires no special development: but as an ultimate and paramount good she is infinitely useful to us as men; and in this sense she has to unfold the faculties by which

she is known and received, and to awaken the aspirations of which she is the object. As a system of means to self-love, she may be known well enough by the calculative faculties ; but as an end she can be truly known only by the eye that is pre-configured to the light of her countenance ; and she must first touch and open that eye for us before she can engage the interest which her nature claims. It is enough, therefore, that art, like religion, though by no means in the same degree, multiplies the aims and objects of our spiritual being ; that, if it does not help us to get rich faster, it helps to raise us above riches ; and that, by giving us nobler loves and nobler cares, it tends to “win us from the gross delights of sense and life’s unspiritual pleasures daily wooed.” Religion and art do not merely feed, but develope us ; not merely give us wealth but soul to enjoy it ; not merely improve our condition as economists, but quicken, unfold and perfect our nature as men. With them and with a proper sense for them as ends we not only have more, but are more ; not only possess other things but become other beings than without them : for the irreligious man is in reality but half a man, and the poorer half at that ; all the better elements of his nature being dead or dormant within him.

TRAGEDY OF MACBETH.

AFTER all, however, I throw out these remarks rather as suggestions than as settled convictions ; and whatever may be their demerits, I am sure they have not the demerit of originality. My object in raising the

question was not so much to give a theoretical solution of it, as to call your attention to the most astonishing practical solution of it in existence. I was led into the discussion by some striking peculiarities in the Tragedy of *Macbeth*, and by Mrs. Siddons's account of her feelings on studying this wonderful performance for stage representation. This remarkable woman informs us, that "she went on with tolerable composure, in the silence of the night, until she came to the assassination scene, when the horrors of the scene rose to such a pitch as made it impossible for her to proceed. Snatching up the candle, she rushed out of the room in a paroxysm of terror. The rustling of her silk dress, as she ascended the stairs, seemed to her panic-struck fancy the movements of a spectre pursuing her. Finding her husband fast asleep, she had no refuge but to throw herself immediately upon the bed, without stopping to put out the light or lay off her clothes."

Now, as some one has remarked, if such were the legitimate effect of this tragedy, as a work of art it would obviously be worthless. From the intensity with which Mrs. Siddons studied a particular scene to the exclusion of the rest, her impression became exaggerated from that of an ideal picture into that of an actual occurrence; illusion passed into delusion; she came to regard it as a matter of fact, not as a work of art; and of course an agony of terror was the result. I probably need not say, that *Macbeth* does not naturally affect us so; if it did, we could not endure to read it: the moment we translate it from ideal into actual, it becomes an insupportable accumulation of horrors. And perhaps it is only by comparing its effects as a matter

of fact and as a work of art, that we can fully realize what a triumph of skill it involves.

In its general features *Macbeth* is exactly the reverse of *Hamlet*; the former being as replete with action as the latter is with thought. By preternatural aid an indomitable lust of power is suddenly enfranchised into "ample room and verge enough the characters of hell to trace." Wicked purposes literally explode into performance; murders, begotten of lawless ambition, are hatched full-grown; while the fires of remorse seem blown into postponement by the very rapidity with which successive designs rush into act. How such a terrific such a fearfully magnificent succession of incantations and assassinations and apparitions and retributions could be moulded into a work of art without defeating the purpose of such a work, is more than I can tell: I can only point to the fact. What, in other hands, had probably turned out a mere heaping of horrors upon horrors' head, has here by some strange potency been made the most magnificent cluster of terrible graces that ever imagination conceived. It is probably this fact that has secured to *Macbeth* that precedence over all other dramas which critics have generally accorded to it; for, in respect of character, it is below several of Shakspeare's plays in quantity if not in quality.

THE WEIRD SISTERS.

THE Weird Sisters are the creatures not of any pre-existing superstition, but purely of Shakspeare's own mind. They are altogether unlike any thing else that

art or superstition ever invented. The old witches of northern mythology would not have answered the poet's purpose: those could only act upon men,—these act within them; those opposed themselves against human will,—these identify themselves with it; those could inflict injury,—these inflict guilt; those could work men's physical ruin,—these win men to work their own spiritual ruin. Macbeth cannot resist them, because they take from him the very will and spirit of resistance. Their power takes hold on him like a fascination of hell: it seems as terrible and as inevitable as that of original sin; insuring the commission of crime, not as a matter of necessity, for then it would be no crime, but simply as a matter of fact. In using them Shakspeare but borrowed the drapery of pre-existing superstition to secure faith in an entirely new creation. Without doing violence to the laws of human belief he was thus enabled to enlist the services of old credulity in favor of agents or instruments suited to his peculiar purpose.

The Weird Sisters are a combination of the terrible and the grotesque, and hold the mind in suspense between laughter and fear. Resembling old women save that they have long beards, they bubble up into human shape, but are free from all human relations; without age, or sex, or kin; without birth, or death; passionless and motionless; anomalous alike in looks, in action, and in speech; nameless themselves, and doing nameless deeds. Coleridge describes them as the imaginative divorced from the good; and this description, to one who understands it, expresses their nature better than any thing else I have seen. Gifted with the powers of pre-

science and prophecy, their predictions seem replete with an indescribable charm which works their own fulfilment, so as almost to leave us in doubt whether they predestinate and produce, or only foresee and foretell the subsequent events.

Such as they are,—

“So withered and so wild in their attire ;
That look not like the inhabitants o’ the earth,
And yet are on’t,”—

such is the language in which they mutter their horrid incantations. It is, if such a thing be possible or imaginable, the poetry of hell, and seems dripping with the very dews of the pit. A wondrous potency, like the fumes of their charmed pot, seems stealing over our minds as they compound the ingredients of their hell-broth. In the materials which make up the contents of their cauldron, such as

“Toad, that under coldest stone,
Days and nights hast thirty-one
Sweltered venom, sleeping got ;
Witch’s mummy ; maw and gulf
Of the ravined salt-sea shark ;
Root of hemlock, digg’d i’ the dark ;
Liver of blaspheming Jew ;
Gall of goat ; and slips of yew,
Slivered in the moon’s eclipse ;
Nose of Turk, and Tartar’s lips ;
Finger of birth-strangled babe,
Ditch-delivered by a drab ;
—— sow’s blood, that hath eaten
Her nine farrow ; grease that’s sweaten
From the murderer’s gibbet ;”—

there is a strange confusion of the natural and supernatural, which serves to enchant and bewilder the mind into passiveness. Our very ignorance of any physical efficacy or tendency in the substances and conditions here specified only enhances to our imagination their moral potency ; so that they seem more powerful over the soul inasmuch as they are powerless over the body.—The Weird Sisters, indeed, and all that belongs to them, are but poetical impersonations of evil influences : they are the imaginative, irresponsible agents or instruments of the devil ; capable of inspiring guilt, but not of incurring it ; in and through whom all the powers of their chief seem bent up to the accomplishment of a given purpose. But with all their essential wickedness there is nothing gross or vulgar or sensual about them. They are the very purity of sin incarnate ; the vestal virgins, so to speak, of hell ; radiant with a sort of inverted holiness ; fearful anomalies in body and soul, in whom every thing seems reversed ; whose elevation is downwards ; whose duty is sin ; whose religion is wickedness ; and the law of whose being is violation of law ! Unlike the Furies of Eschylus, they are petrific, not to the senses, but to the thoughts. At first, indeed, on merely looking *at* them, we can hardly keep from laughing, so uncouth and grotesque is their appearance : but afterwards, on looking *into* them, we find them terrible beyond description ; and the more we look into them, the more terrible do they become ; the blood almost curdling in our veins as, dancing and singing their infernal glees over embryo murders, they unfold to our thoughts the cold, passionless, inexhaustible malignity and deformity of their nature.

In beings thus made and thus mannered ; in their fantastical and unearthly aspect, awakening mixed emotions of terror and mirth ; in their ominous reserve and oracular brevity of speech, so fitted at once to overcome scepticism, to sharpen curiosity, and to feed ambitious hopes ; in the circumstances of their prophetic greeting, a blasted heath, as a spot deserted by nature and sacred to infernal orgies,—the influences of the place thus falling in with the supernatural style and matter of their disclosures ; in all this we may recognize a peculiar adaptedness to generate even in the strongest minds a belief in their predictions.

What effect, then, do the Weird Sisters have on the action of the play ? Are their disclosures necessary to the enacting of the subsequent crimes ? and, if so, are they necessary as the cause, or only as the condition of those crimes ? Do they operate to deprave, or only to develop the characters brought under their influence ? In a word, do they create the evil heart, or only untie the evil hands ? These questions have been variously answered by critics. Not to dwell on these various answers, it seems to me tolerably clear, that the agency of the Weird Sisters extends only to the inspiring of confidence in what they predict. This confidence they awaken in Banquo equally as in Macbeth ; yet the only effect of their proceedings on Banquo is to try and prove his virtue. The fair inference, then, is, that they furnish the motives, not the principles of action ; and these motives are of course to good or to bad, according to the several preformations and predispositions of character whereon they operate. But what relation does motive bear to action ? On this point, too, it seems to me

there has been much of needless confusion. Now moral action, like vision, presupposes two things, a condition and a cause. Light and visual power are both indispensable to sight: there can be no vision without light; yet the cause of vision, as every-body knows, is the visual power pre-existing in the eye. Neither can we walk without an area to walk upon; yet nobody, I suppose, would pronounce that area the cause of our walking. On the contrary, that cause is obviously within ourselves; it lies in our own innate mobility; and the area is necessary only as the condition of our walking. In like manner both will and motive are indispensable to moral action. We cannot act without motives, any more than we can breathe without air; yet the cause of our acting lies in certain powers and principles within us. As, therefore, vision springs from the meeting of visual power with light, so action springs from the meeting of will with motive. Surely, then, those who persist in holding motives responsible for our actions, would do well to remember, that motives can avail but little after all without something to be moved.

One of the necessary conditions of our acting, in all cases, is a belief in the possibility and even the practicability of what we undertake. However ardent and lawless may be our desire of a given object, still a conviction of the impossibility of reaching it necessarily precludes all efforts to reach it. So fully are we persuaded that we cannot jump over the moon, that we do not even wish, much less attempt to do it. Generally, indeed, apprehensions and assurances more or less strong of failure and punishment in criminal attempts operate to throw us back upon better principles of action; we

make a virtue of necessity ; and from the danger and difficulty of indulging evil and unlawful desires, fall back upon such as are lawful and good ; wherein, to our surprise, nature often rewards us with far greater pleasures than we had anticipated from the opposite course. He who removes those apprehensions and assurances from any wicked enterprise, and convinces us of its safety and practicability, may be justly said to furnish us motives to engage in it ; that is, he gives us the conditions *upon which*, but not the principles *from which*, our actions proceed ; and therefore does not, properly speaking, deprave, but only developes our character. For example, in ambition itself, unchecked and unrestrained by any higher principles, are contained the elements of all the crimes necessary to the successful prosecution of its objects. I say *successful* prosecution ; for such ambition is, from its nature, regardless of every thing but the chances of defeat : so that nothing less than the conviction or the apprehension that crimes will not succeed, can prevent such ambition from employing them.

MACBETH.

Now, in Macbeth and Lady Macbeth the Weird Sisters find minds pre-configured and pre-attempered to their influences ; and their success seems owing to the fact, that the hearts of their victims were already open to welcome and entertain their suggestions. Macbeth, by his great qualities, his valour, his able conduct and admirable success, has won for himself not only the highest rank but one in the kingdom but the first place in the

confidence and affection of his sovereign. What principles his great actions have hitherto sprung from, whether from loyalty or ambition, is uncertain : if from loyalty, then he is probably satisfied ; if from ambition, he is only inflamed, and the height he has reached prepares him for projects to mount up higher. This point, so uncertain to us, is known to the Weird Sisters. They look not only into the seeds of time but into the seeds of Macbeth's character ; and they are enabled to cast his horoscope and predict his fortune, partly by what they see before him, and partly by what they see within him. At his meeting with them Macbeth's mind, unstaid by principle, flushed with recent victory, and thirsting for glory the more for the glory he has just been winning, is in a proper state for generating or receiving superstitious impressions, especially if those impressions offer any encouragement to his ruling passion. They have but to engage his faith in their predictions ; and this readily follows from the condition in which they find him.

Critics have differed a good deal as to the origin of Macbeth's purpose to usurp the crown by murdering the king. That this purpose originates with Macbeth himself, I can find no room for doubt. The promise of the throne by the Weird Sisters is no more an instigation to murder for it, than the promise of wealth in similar circumstances would be an instigation to steal for it. To a truly honest, upright man such a promise, in so far as he trusted in it, would obviously preclude the motives to theft ; and his argument at worst would be, that inasmuch as he was destined to be rich he had nothing to do but sit still and wait for the riches to come. If, how-

ever, he were already a thief at heart, and restrained from actual thieving only by prudential regards, he would naturally construe the promise of wealth into a promise of impunity in theft, and accordingly go to stealing. Such appears to be the case with Macbeth. Having just received two promises, namely, that he should be thane of Cawdor and that he should be king, he proceeds forthwith to argue against the probability of either event; as men often argue against what they wish to find true. His argument is this:—

“The thane of Cawdor lives,
A prosperous gentleman; and, to be king,
Stands not within the prospect of belief,
No more than to be Cawdor.”

Now, he has just fought and defeated the thane of Cawdor as a rebel and a traitor, and therefore knows that in all probability his life and title are forfeit to the state; and he seems to spy a sort of hope that he may be Cawdor sure enough; and if so, then why not king? Presently, however, come messengers from the king to greet him thane of Cawdor; and this literal fulfilment of one promise confirms at once his faith in the other promise: this, trusted home, at once “enkindles him unto the crown.” Upon this confirmation the pre-existing elements of his character immediately gather and fashion themselves into the purpose in question. The assurance of the crown becomes to him only an assurance of impunity in crime. Thus—

“Oftentimes, to win us to our harm,
The instruments of darkness tell us truths;

Win us with honest trifles, to betray us
In deepest consequence."

The Weird Sisters, then, put nothing into Macbeth, but only bring out what was already there. They seem drawn to him, indeed, by the secret sympathy which evil naturally has with evil :—

"By the pricking of their thumbs,
Something wicked this way comes ;"

and it is this knowledge that invites their prophetic greeting. They saw the seeds of murder sleeping within him, and ready to germinate into purpose as soon as breathed upon by the hope of success and impunity. To inspire him with this hope was all they had to do,—a task made easy by the fact, that men are apt to believe what they so earnestly desire to have true ; and no sooner have they opened upon him the prospect of success than the germs of wickedness within him forthwith begin to sprout and grow.

"Two truths are told,
As happy prologues to the swelling act
Of the imperial theme.—
This supernatural soliciting
Cannot be ill, cannot be good :—If ill,
Why hath it given me earnest of success,
Commencing in a truth ?
If good, why do I yield to that suggestion,
Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair,
And make my seated heart knock at my ribs,
Against the use of nature ?"

Some, however, have maintained that the wicked

purpose not only originates with Macbeth, but was deliberately formed by him and imparted to his wife before his meeting with the Weird Sisters. On this ground there is nothing for the Weird Sisters to do ; and their agency goes rather to perplex and embarrass than facilitate and explain the action that follows. There needed no preternatural agents come from the world of devils to develop a purpose already ripe for execution ! It is the very necessity of their predictions that justifies the introducing of them into the play ; otherwise their presence would be an obvious superfluity and incumbrance to the drama. The truth, it seems to me, is, that the purpose in question neither originates with the Weird Sisters nor with Macbeth before his meeting with them. Nor does this position at all affect Macbeth's responsibility, or anyway clash with the ordinary laws of human action. Macbeth doubtless had will enough before, but nothing short of supernatural agencies could furnish the motives to develop his will into act. In his lawless ambition, his indomitable lust of power and popularity, the same impulses which have hitherto prompted his heroic exploits,—in these are involved the principles of his subsequent crimes ; but his conviction of the impossibility of succeeding in such crimes of course precludes the conditions answering to those principles. In a word, it is not that he lacks the heart, but that Providence ties his hands. Some extraordinary assurances therefore are indispensable, not indeed as the origin or cause, but simply as the occasion of his wicked purpose. Hence the necessity of the Weird Sisters to the rational accomplishment of the poet's design. Without their supernatural disclosures it would be impossible

not only for us to account for Macbeth's conduct, but for Macbeth himself to act as he does ; so that the existence of such beings is far more probable in reason than such action would be without them. Thus we shall always find, that of two improbabilities Shakspeare uniformly chooses the least ; as, for example, in the case before us, to shun the anti-natural, he takes refuge in the supernatural : whenever he goes above nature, it is to avoid going against her.

With Macbeth, then, the conviction of impossibility has hitherto kept the general desire from passing into the definite resolve. *I cannot* hangs like a mill-stone about the neck of *I would*, holding it down out of the sight of others and even of himself ; for he never conceives himself capable of such a horrid intent until, to his amazement, he finds himself actually harbouring it. He is a man of great powers as well as strong passions : and with his wise foresight and circumspection, with his "large discourse looking before and after," he knows that such an undertaking is like going to war with the nature of things ; that without some miraculous intervention the consequences must in all probability recoil upon himself ; and this knowledge, though it does not preclude the wish, effectually precludes the attempt. In short, he "is afraid to be the same in his own act and valour as he is in desire ;" "would not play false, and yet would wrongly win ;" and "rather fears to do the deed than wishes it undone." Thus his indwelling germs of sin are kept from budding and blossoming out into conscious thought and purpose. But this conviction of impossibility, though the chief, is not the only restraint upon his ambition :—

“He’s here in double trust :

First, as I am his kinsman and his subject,
Strong both against the deed ; then, as his host,
Who should against his murderer shut the door,
Not bear the knife myself. Besides, this Duncan
Hath borne his faculties so meek, hath been
So clear in his great office, that his virtues
Will plead like angels, trumpet-tongued, against
The deep damnation of his taking off.”

Here we see he has moral as well as prudential objections to crime ; motives of duty as well as of interest against it ; and though neither his virtue nor his prudence alone is an overmatch for his ambition, both of them together are. What is necessary, therefore, in order to set his ambition free, is, to obviate his prudential objections, to nullify his motives of interest, and quiet his apprehension of the consequences. It is on this principle that the Weird Sisters proceed. Their preternatural insight both of what is in the future and of what is in him, teaches them how and where he is vulnerable. By throwing the security of fate around him, by convincing him of the safety and practicability of the undertaking, they reconcile his circumspection with his ambition, and bribe his reason into the service and support of his passion.

Herein lies the difference between Banquo and Macbeth. The former shrinks from the guilt of crime, and therefore borrows no encouragement from assurances of success ; the latter shrinks from the danger of crime, and therefore rushes into it as soon as such assurances are given him. Banquo’s ambition is restrained by principle ; Macbeth’s by prudence : with the one therefore

the revelations of fate preclude the motives to crime ; with the other those revelations themselves become the motives to crime. Macbeth's starting upon hearing the predictions of the Weird Sisters is but the bursting of a germ of wickedness into conception ; and his subsequent starting upon the fulfilment of one of their predictions is but the bursting of that conception into resolution. Banquo starts not in either case, because he has no such germs of wickedness for them to work upon ; so that " he neither begs nor fears their favour nor their hate." Macbeth hears their prophetic greeting with terror, because it awakens in him thoughts of crime ; Banquo hears it with composure, because in him it only awakens resolutions of virtue. Thus the self-same thing is often a temptation to one man and a warning to another ; where the former sees a prize to be sought, the latter sees only a snare to be shunned. The Weird Sisters now harp Macbeth's wish aright, as they afterwards harp his fear ; and they at once engage his faith and awaken his fears by realizing him to himself and showing him what he is. Macbeth kisses the confirmation from which Banquo recoils. It is the greedy fish that snatches at the bait.

"If chance will have me king, why, chance may crown me,
Without my stir,"

is but the momentary recoil of Macbeth's conscience from a suggestion which he lacks the will to oppose. He thus tries to arm himself against prospective and preventive remorse. The truth is, chance but awakens in him the "black and deep desires" which have hitherto been kept asleep by chance. His virtue is altogether

a dependent, conditional virtue ; a reverse of circumstances therefore reverses the entire scope and drift of his action. He is rather guilty of tempting the Weird Sisters than of being tempted by them ; at least he tempts them to tempt him.

Macbeth is surprised and terrified at his own hell-begotten conception. There is nothing in the play more profound or more natural than this. The Weird Sisters have brought fire, as it were, to the characters traced as with sympathetic ink upon his soul ; and he shudders with horror as he reads the darkening and deepening, but hitherto unsuspected inscription.

“ The thought, whose murder yet is but fantastical,
Shakes so his single state of man, that function
Is smothered in surmise ; and nothing is,
But what is not.”

Like others, he knows not, suspects not, the innate and essential evil of his heart until prospect awakens it into purpose or occasion develops it into performance. Engrossed in the pursuit of glory, he has taken his ideas of himself from public opinion ; and of course dreams not that his heart is a nest of cockatrice's eggs till opportunity hatches out the serpents into the eye of consciousness : he knows not what he is capable of doing until he ascertains from the perfectest report what is possible to be done. Hitherto his ambition and his imagination have kept billing and cooing each other on ; now they are brought into conflict, and his imagination shudders at the deeds which his ambition persuades. Without strict and constant self-examination we cannot know what we *are* except by what we *do* ; and doubt-

less many of us would tremble at ourselves, were some preternatural assurance of success and impunity to unfold our latent capabilities of evil into conscious thought and purpose. The truth is, we know not how frail a thing our boasted virtue is, nor how much we are indebted for it, frail as it is, to the kindliness of favouring circumstances. How many of us rush into crime with all the chances of detection and punishment before us; if all those chances were removed, how many more of us would rush into crime! It almost makes one shudder to think of it! On the whole, the precept, "Keep thy heart diligently, for out of it are the issues of life," is nearly as wise, I suspect, as any thing that has yet come from the mouth of infidelity.

But, though Macbeth has the wickedness to originate, he lacks the firmness to execute, the design of murdering the king. His strength and irritability both of understanding and of imagination are more than a match for his ambition; and his infirmity and vacillation of purpose is but a struggle between them. He foresees many dangers and imagines many more. It is not so much the guilt, however, as the failure of the undertaking that he fears. The very height to which his ambition is vaulting makes him fear it will overleap itself; and his apprehensions of defeat prevent his forming any plans to insure success. He is to run for a prize of glory, and he dare not start in the race lest he should lose the prize by overrunning.

"If it were done, when 'tis done, then 'twere well
It were done quickly: If the assassination
Could trammel up the consequence, and catch,
With his surcease, success; that but this blow

Might be the be-all and the end-all here,
But here, upon this bank and shoal of time,
We'd jump the life to come. But, in these cases,
We still have judgment here; that we but teach
Bloody instructions, which, being taught, return
To plague the inventor: This even-handed justice
Commends the ingredients of our poison'd chalice
To our own lips."

The truth is, Macbeth has not faith enough in the Weird Sisters to overcome the suggestions of experience and the terrors of imagination; he cannot bring himself to trust their word against the natural and ordinary course of things. "*If we should fail*"—this is the point whereon he sticks; and he must not only believe in the practicability of the undertaking, but see his way clear through it before he can venture upon it. By a miracle he has been called to an act which he wishes done, yet fears to do; and he thinks that nothing less than a perpetual miracle can tie up the consequences of such an act. The question with him is, from whence is this latter miracle to come? Thus his mind is held in suspense between the miracle which invites him to the deed and the unknown miracle which is to avert its consequences from himself.

LADY MACBETH.

It is this circumstance that necessitates the intervention of Lady Macbeth, who shares, indeed, her husband's ambition, but lacks his strength and activity of mind. Hence, while his letter to her, relating the events which

have happened to him, affects her will just as those events themselves affected his own, the effect on her mind is just the reverse of what it is upon his ; she being of course inaccessible to the prudential misgivings and horrible imaginings that so haunt and unnerve him. The predictions of the Weird Sisters scare up a throng of fears in his mind ; they leave no room for fear in hers : she sees only the prize to be won ; he together with this, sees also the dangers to be incurred. The truth is, she has not foresight nor imagination enough to frighten her back from the crimes to which her ambition prompts. Thus, what terrifies him transports her ; what fills him with apprehension fills her with enthusiasm ; what stimulates his reflective powers stifles hers. She, thoughtless of consequences, would catch the nearest way ; he, provident of consequences, would pause and look for the safest way. Accordingly, as he is too much troubled with apprehensions to form any plans, so she is too busy in forming plans to be troubled with any apprehensions ; and he is "settled, and bends up each corporal agent to the terrible feat," as soon as she points out the means of safety and success. Moreover, she expels his fear of the consequences by inspiring him with a greater fear of herself. Much as he dreads the prospect of worldly retribution, he dreads still more the bitter biting taunts, and the scornful sarcastic reproaches of the woman whom he loves, and by whom he knows he is loved. To be called a coward by such a woman is of course the very last thing that a soldier can bear : to say he will sooner die is nothing ; there is scarce any thing conceivable, in this world or the next, that he will not rather endure !

In their remarks upon Lady Macbeth critics generally have fallen, it seems to me, into the common but pernicious style of thinking which presumes the more headlong and headstrong person to be the greater. Macbeth, I apprehend, is truly as much greater in every respect, though not as much better, as he is more irresolute than his wife. She is certainly a bold bad woman whom we fear and pity ; but we can hardly predicate any kind of superiority on the fact, that her resolution quails not before dangers which she lacks the foresight to discern and the imagination to conceive. Even so might a blind man walk on the edge of a precipice with a composure and steadiness that would be impossible for a man with eyes ; nay, in such an undertaking the blind man might even derive safety and success from his very blindness. Assuredly, Macbeth shows more true force of will by the temporary abandonment of his purpose than she does by her reckless adherence to it. " 'Tis the eye of childhood fears a painted devil." Yes ; but it is the want of any eye whatever that fears not a real devil ! If "the sleeping and the dead are but as pictures" to her, it must be rather because she is too weak than because she is too strong to recognize the difference. "A little water clears us of the deed," may argue strength of nerve, but not of mind or of will. Lady Macbeth, then, I suspect, is too blind to see, rather than too resolute to fear the true terrors of such an undertaking ; insensible rather than invincible to the reasons against it ; and her freedom from prudential scruples and misgivings springs not so much from peculiar strength of will as from comparative want of reflection. There is, in short, a predominant matter-of-factness about

Lady Macbeth, which renders her inaccessible alike to the motives that deter her husband from the first crime, and to those that prompt him to the subsequent crimes.

A late writer in the *Westminster Review*, while he accords to Macbeth great redundancy and excitability of imagination, at the same time pronounces selfishness the exclusive law and impulse of his character. And he not only represents Macbeth as entirely selfish, but also represents Lady Macbeth as entirely disinterested ; denies him any sympathy or affection for her, save as an instrument of his ambition, and denies her any ambition, save from sympathy and affection for him. Here, truly, we have rather the simplicity of personified abstractions than the complexity of living persons. Surely this looks very like turning characters into caricatures ; for we can hardly conceive of a person's acting so long a time from a single motive or a single impulse. People of one passion are seldom to be met with, save in bad books ; and it seems hardly wise thus to wrangle Shakspeare's masterpieces into blunders. Now, in the first place, such exclusive selfishness and such excess of imagination, as are here attributed to Macbeth, seem rather incompatible ; for imagination, being objective in its nature and its workings, naturally involves more or less of self-oblivion. And besides, the power which Lady Macbeth wields over her husband can be rationally accounted for only on the ground that he truly loves her. It is the very strength of his affection for her as his wife and his "dearest partner in greatness," that makes her reproaches so formidable as to countervail his fear of worldly retribution. A man had as lief be called a coward as not by a woman he does not respect.

In all probability, they both desire the crown, partly for themselves, and partly for each other ; and we might as well say, that he is ambitious only from sympathy with her, as that she is ambitious only from sympathy with him. It is the very prospect of sharing and enhancing each other's greatness that prompts them to their wicked enterprise ; it is by being mutually answered and reflected that their passion rises to such a pitch of intensity as to overbear all opposing considerations. Indeed, there is something of disinterestedness in Macbeth's very ambition itself ; for men may be disinterested in bad passions as well as in good ones,—may sacrifice themselves to the devil as well as to God. Power and popularity—"to ride in triumph on men's tongues"—in a word, glory, is an object which Macbeth loves and pursues with a perfect passion ; an object and a passion in which self is in some degree lost and forgotten. That he loves glory more than life and dreads infamy more than death,—this is the quality of his ambition ; and the fear, not that his passion may defeat his interest, but that it may defeat itself, is the very thing that breaks down his resolution.

A strong and excitable imagination, set on fire of conscience, naturally fascinates and spell-binds the other faculties, and thus gives an objective force and effect to its own internal workings. Under this guilt-begotten hallucination the subject loses present dangers in horrible imaginings, and comes to be tormented with his own involuntary creations. Thus conscience inflicts its retributions, not directly in the form of remorse, but indirectly through imaginary terrors which again react on the conscience, as fire is kept burning by the current

of air which itself generates. In such a mind the workings of conscience may be prospective and preventive; the very conception of crime starting up a swarm of terrific visions to withhold the subject from perpetration. Arrangement is thus made in our nature for a process of compensation, in that the same faculty which invests crime with unreal attractions also calls up unreal terrors to deter from its commission. A predominance of this faculty everywhere marks the character and conduct of Macbeth. Hence his apparent freedom from compunctious visitings even when he is in reality most subject to them. He seems conscienceless from the very form in which his conscience works; seems flying from outward dangers, while conscious guilt is the very source of his apprehensions. It is probably from oversight of this that some have pronounced him a mere cautious, timid, remorseless villain, restrained from crime only by a shrinking, selfish apprehensiveness. Undoubtedly there is much in his conduct that appears to sustain this view: he does indeed seem dead to the guilt and morbidly alive to the dangers of his situation; free from remorses of conscience and filled with terrors of imagination; unchecked by moral feelings and oppressed by selfish fears: but whence his wonderful and uncontrollable irritability of imagination? how comes his mind so prolific of horrible imaginings, but that his imagination itself is set on fire of hell? The truth is, he seems remorseless only because in his mind the agonies of remorse project and translate themselves into the spectres of a conscience-stricken imagination.

In *Lady Macbeth*, on the contrary, the workings of conscience can only be retrospective and retributive:

she is too unimaginative either to be allured to crime by imaginary splendours, or withheld from it by imaginary terrors. Without an organ to project and embody its workings in outward visions, her conscience can only prey upon itself in the tortures of remorse. Accordingly, she knows no compunctious visitings before the deed, nor any suspension or alleviation of them after it. Thus, from her want or weakness of imagination she becomes the victim of a silent but most dreadful retribution. Conscience being left to its own resources, she may indeed possess its workings in secret, but she can never for a moment repress them ; nay, she cannot reveal them if she would, and she dare not if she could ; the fires burn not outwards into spectres to sear her eyeballs and frighten her out of her self-possession, but concentrate themselves into hotter fury within her. This is a form of anguish to which heaven has apparently denied the relief or the mitigation of utterance. The agonies of an embosomed hell cannot be told, they can only be felt ; or, at most, the awful secret can be but dimly shadowed forth, in the sighings of the furnace when all is asleep but the unquenchable fire, or in the burning asunder of the cords that unite the soul to its earthly dwelling-place. With such amazing depth and power of insight does Shakspeare detect and unfold the secret workings of the human mind !

From this original difference of mental structure in Macbeth and Lady Macbeth the workings of conscience naturally operate to reform her and to deprave him ; for she, feeling the source of her disquietude to be within, resigns herself up to the furies of her own mind,

while he, fancying his disquietude to come from without, is hurried on from crime to crime, in order to secure himself in what he has already done. His vivid excitable imagination overpowering his self-control, his very efforts to dissimulate only bring on the hallucination that betrays him. The same mysterious flaws and starts which awaken in others suspicions of his guilt, awaken in himself suspicions that he is suspected. With guilt staring him in the face and danger dogging at his heels, his first crime breaks down the courage which alone could enable him to stop. The very blood which he spills to quiet his fears, sprouts up in "gorgons and chimeras dire" to awaken new fears and call for new victims. His cowardice urges him on to fresh murders, and every murder but adds to his cowardice. The more wretched his earthly existence becomes, the more he dreads to part with it, and strangles his life into spasms by the very tenacity with which he grasps it. The workings of conscience begit misgivings of his fate; these misgivings drive him to the Weird Sisters for increased security; and this security but emboldens him to fresh crimes, that he may "make assurance doubly sure, and take a bond of fate." They now harp his fear aright, as they before harped his wish, and engage his faith by uttering his thoughts. The same misgivings, however, which before shook down his resolution to join a league with fate, now inspire him with audacity to enter the lists against it; and he proceeds to dash his own brains out in trying to batter down the walls wherein he has trusted for protection. The trouble with him is, he mistakes inward retribution for outward danger. Once a guardian angel to prevent his

starting, imagination has now become an avenging fiend to prevent his stopping in wickedness. Through his plenitude of this faculty conscience peoples his whereabout with imaginary terrors which he only multiplies and magnifies by every effort to remove them. Thus every step he takes but augments the propelling force ; and the very faculty which translates and mitigates remorse into terror, leads him to believe a lie, as if on purpose that his damnation may be the hotter and the surer. Truly, in all this we have a picture at which the Furies themselves might well turn pale !

But what in Macbeth thus accelerates, in Lady Macbeth, on the contrary, arrests the career of guilt ; so that while he grows worse, she grows better to the end of the play. Beginning, perhaps, more wicked than her husband, she ends far less so. She has, indeed, no progress in crime, because her mind, undeceived by the maddening and merciless suspicions of guilty fear, locates her sufferings where she can never hope by any outward exertions to remove them. As she had no terrible apprehensions to hold her back from the first crime, so she now has none to goad her on to other crimes. No sooner has her ambition reached its object, than its despotism passes without abatement into the hands of conscience, transforming all her feelings and faculties into scorpions, to hunt and whip and sting her blasted spirit through the fires of remorse.

Mrs. Siddons, it is said, always maintained that her own person was unsuited to the part of Lady Macbeth, whom she regarded as of a rather slender, fragile make, full, indeed, of spirit and energy and fire, but withal exquisitely delicate and feminine in her composition.

On this ground I can understand why her husband should regard and treat her as he does. Such, assuredly, is the woman for such a man to love and respect, and whose respect and love might be and ought to be dearer to him than life. Were she the fierce scolding virago that she is generally considered to be, I cannot see how he could either wish to promote her honour, or fear to incur her reproach. Such, then, I confess, is my own view of Lady Macbeth: I can see nothing viraginous or Amazonian about her character. She has indeed the ambition to wish herself unsexed, but she has not the power to unsex herself except in words. Though she calls on the "murdering ministers" to

"come to her woman's breasts,
And take her milk for gall,"

still she cannot make them obey, and her milk, in spite of herself, continues to be milk. What she lacks in the imagination of a man is amply made up in the feelings of a woman; and where the former prevents her husband from acting, the latter still more prevents her from acting. And herein lies the difference in this respect between imagination and feeling, that the one acts chiefly at a distance, the other on the spot. Accordingly, when she has raised the steel, and sees before her, as it were, the murder which she has all but done, her woman's heart suddenly relents and stays her uplifted arm. "Had not the king resembled her father as he slept," she had done it. Thus it is not her foresight or apprehension of remote possible or probable consequences, but simply her milk of woman's kindness

that breaks down her resolution in the very act of performance. Unrestrained by the forecastings of her husband's large discourse, she nevertheless yields, when she least expects, to the touch of nature, and is made as irresolute by the present workings of her heart, as he is by the prospective workings of his head. She would have died perhaps, to save the father, whose hallowed image thus shielded the sleeping king from her dagger. She thinks, indeed, that she can do every thing till she comes to the trial, when she utterly fails: in prospect the deed has no terrors for her; but in performance she finds herself better than she was aware. Firm and fierce in anticipation, she is mild and gentle in execution. Macbeth, on the contrary, thinks he can do nothing till he comes to the trial, when all is easy enough. The terrors which at a distance from the deed seemed infinite, vanish as he comes to do it; and he marches without flinching through the crime which he had shuddered to imagine. Such is the practical difference between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth: where his imagination acts least, her feelings act most; as they approach the wicked deed and see it passing into a fact before them, its terrors naturally diminish to him, but increase to her; for he has imagined more than he finds, she finds more than she has imagined.

Fearfully wicked, therefore, as is her conduct, Lady Macbeth, nevertheless, is every inch a woman. Her true strength lies not so much in force of will or firmness of purpose as in her almost intuitive insight of her husband's weaknesses. With her clear, penetrating, but not comprehensive woman's eye she has plucked from him the heart of his mystery. Her exquisite perception

of his most secret avenues and approaches enables her at the same time to put spurs to his ambition and apply cordials to his fear : though the feelings of the woman unnerve the arm of the murderess, her tongue is valiant enough for any thing, and she knows how to transfer its valour into her husband's arm ; for she can whisper words in his ear more fearful to him than all the spectres his fancy can create and all the dangers his circumspection can foresee.

It must be confessed, however, that two characters may be easily made out for Lady Macbeth, according as we proceed upon what she says, or upon what she does. Up to the time of the assassination she does indeed talk big as ever virago did or could ; but I cannot help thinking that her deeds are much better than her words as a test and exponent of her real character. I submit therefore, that Lady Macbeth, knowing and fearing her husband's nature,—that he

“ Is too full o' the milk of human kindness,
To catch the nearest way ;”

and that, though “ not without ambition,” he is “ without the illness should attend it,”—that knowing and fearing this, she therefore assumes a false character in order to shame and embolden him into the work she has in view. Hence her eager wish to

“ Pour her spirits in his ear,
And chastise with the valour of her tongue
All that impedes him from the golden round,
Which fate and metaphysical aid doth seem
To have him crowned withal.”

And perhaps the frightful, hair-stiffening extravagance of her earlier speeches, as contrasted with her subsequent deeds, should be viewed as proving that in the former she is trying to act a part which is really foreign to her, and under which her nature finally gives way and breaks down. In that most terrific speech, indeed, beginning—

“The raven himself is hoarse,
That croaks the fatal entrance of Duncan
Under my battlements,”

her terrible eloquence of description seems to spring from her very horror in contemplating what she describes; as men's fear to attempt what they threaten sometimes inspires them with greater violence and volubility in threatening. Accordingly, in her personation of Lady Macbeth Mrs. Siddons is said to have wound up the horrible climax of this speech in a scream, a perfect yell, as if she were almost frightened out of her wits by the audacity of her own tongue. Thus a spasmodic action of fear may naturally lend her, as it sometimes actually lends others, an appearance of super-human courage and boldness. The very excitement of terror seems to impart an extraordinary illumination and utterancy to her mind; to “transport her beyond the ignorant present,” so that she “feels the future in the instant.” It is worthy of remark, that Macbeth himself is amazed at her more than masculine audacity of speech; and the contrast between her present and former deportment, is doubtless the cause, as she foresaw it would be, of her subsequent influence over him. The seeing her, a delicate, fragile woman, appear, as if inspired by the

occasion, to rise so much above herself, is of course the strongest motive he could have not to fall below himself. Mistaking her now, he therefore supposes he has mistaken her before; and what is an assumed character he thinks is her real one, which she has hitherto concealed from him. If in his admiration of her "undaunted mettle," he is deceived, it is not strange that others should be equally deceived in regard to her.

Of Lady Macbeth, therefore, it seems to me that we may truly say, "bold is her tongue because her heart is not." Woman as she is, the spirits which she calls upon to unsex her leave her no less a woman than they find her; indeed, it is because she wishes to be something that she is not that she craves their help; it is because she feels and knows herself to be a woman that she calls upon them to unsex her. The terrific sublimity of her invocation to the murdering ministers, to

"Fill her, from the crown to the toe, topfull
Of direst cruelty,"

which almost erects the hair and freezes the blood, but expresses the violence of her resolution against the tender impulses of which she is habitually conscious: it is a convulsive effort to brace and stay herself, lest some compunctious visitings should shake her fell purpose. With forced boldness of tongue and fancy she thus tries to school and steel herself into a firmness and fierceness of which she feels the want. In short, "bold are her words because her deeds are not." At all events, whether from overacting her real character or from overstraining her powers to act an assumed one, there

can be no doubt that her energies break down beneath her undertaking: if it be her real character, then, as she never enacted it before, so she never attempts to enact it again. No sooner is the fatal deed performed than the access and passage of remorse are effectually and forever unstopped; no sooner is she fairly introduced amid the horrors of their manifold tragedy than she fails and faints away, and the woman which she had so fearfully disclaimed returns to torment and persecute and waste her into her grave. In the words of Coleridge, "she mistakes courage of fantasy for power to bear the consequences of actual guilt; and shames her husband with a superhuman audacity of thought and speech which she cannot support, but sinks in the season of remorse, and dies in suicidal agony."

After the murder of the king Lady Macbeth obviously sympathizes with none of her husband's gratuitous atrocities. Free from the horrible imaginings which embarrassed him in the outset, she is also free from the cruel suspicions which impel him onward; and she spends in repenting of the deed what time he spends in fortifying himself against its consequences. - When, upon her first interview with him after receiving his letter, she finds or fancies that his "face is as a book where men may read strange matters," she knows his thoughts because she has the same thoughts herself; his designs are at once revealed to her from her intense sympathy with them. Again, having resolved on the murder of Banquo, he hopes and expects to find her thoughts echoing and supporting his own; but her inability to take his suggestions proves that she has no such stuff in her mind. That she cannot enter into the

meaning of his dark insinuations, is to him a pledge of disappointment ; for he knows that if she were ready to approve of this crime, as she was of the first, she would understand him at once. Hence, the very need of speaking plainer satisfies him that it is useless ; for he wishes not to make her guilty of his designs, but to find her already so ; and he would have her “innocent of the knowledge until she applaud the deed.” Perhaps she rather will not than cannot take his meaning ; perhaps she rather chooses to seem, than actually is, ignorant of his purpose, because she is ashamed, in the face of her recent instigations, to dissuade him from it, and at the same time fears the responsibility of encouraging him in it. And, on the other hand, perhaps he is afraid to speak in plainer terms, lest he should thereby force her to dissuade him from a crime which he wishes to commit ; for men in such situations often take care not to provoke any advice or remonstrance against their purposes.

Like most of her sex, Lady Macbeth never for a moment wavers, or hesitates, or dwells in suspense between antagonist motives. No sooner has she conceived the wicked purpose than all her feelings and faculties meet and centre upon it ; and she glides freely and smoothly along through the briers and brambles of her undertaking until she reaches her stopping place, because she has no dangling or outstanding ends or thrums or hooks of thought for them to catch hold of. It is this confluence of all the feelings and faculties in one paramount aim, which, more perhaps than any thing else, distinguishes the female character, and which makes it so difficult, I might almost say impossible, either to

corrupt a virtuous, or to reform a vicious woman. Angels, once fallen, of course become the most incorrigible of devils. Hence it is that women generally are so much better or so much worse than the other sex. They seldom halt between two opinions; rarely linger at the half-way house of sin; hardly ever rest or rock in a state of moral betweenity; never stop to parley or play at hide-and-seek or carry on a flirtation with the devil, but either embrace him or spurn him at once. Accordingly, it is a matter of common remark, that a good head often saves a man from a bad heart, or a good heart from a bad head; but that in woman both head and heart generally are good or bad together, so that she can never fall back upon the one to save herself from the tendencies of the other.

This oneness and entireness of movement, this perfect freedom from the disharmony of conflicting impulses, makes Lady Macbeth as feminine as she is wicked, and even makes her appear more feminine the wickeder she becomes. But she stops as suddenly and as entirely as she starts; her feelings and faculties have the same unanimity in retreating as in advancing. Fearful as she is in wickedness, she becomes equally pitiable in wretchedness, leaving pity and terror to contend for the writing of her epitaph. Her freedom, however, from nervous and intellectual irritability secures her against spilling the secret of her guilt: subject to no fantastical terrors nor moral illusions, she never in the least loses her self-control. The fearful ceaseless corrodings of her rooted sorrow may destroy, but cannot betray her, unless when the sense of her senses is shut in sleep. Her profound silence respecting "the perilous stuff which weighs upon

her heart," makes an impression which all attempts at utterance would but weaken. We feel that beneath it lies a depth of woe and horror which can be disclosed only by drawing a veil over it. I know of no single scene in Shakspeare which for depth of truth and subtle intensity of terror equals the one where Lady Macbeth's conscience, sleepless amid the sleep of nature, nay, most restless in its gnawings then when all other cares are at rest, drives her forth, open-eyed yet sightless, to sigh and groan over spots on her hands which are visible to none save herself, nor even to herself save when she is blind to every thing else. That, when asleep, she should be unable to keep in what, when awake, she is equally unable to let out; that nothing but sleep should have power to unbind the secret of her soul, and that not even sleep itself should have power to keep that secret bound; this, surely, is not more true to nature than it is terrific to the imagination; and yet both its truth and its terror are purely of a moral and spiritual quality. There is, indeed, an awful pathos pervading this scene, which leaves no element of our moral nature untouched. An awful mystery, too, hangs over the death of this woman, which no imagination can ever exhaust. We know not, the poet himself appears not to know, whether the eating back of her soul upon itself drives her to suicidal violence, or itself cuts asunder the cords of her life; whether the gnawings of the undying worm kill her, or she kills herself in order to escape them. All that we know is, that the death of her body springs in some way from the inextinguishable life and the immedicable wound of her soul. What a history of her woman's heart, of her woman's delicate frame and fiery spirit, is written in her thus



sinking and sinking away, until she gets where imagination shrinks from following her, under the violence of an invisible, yet unmistakable disease, which forever keeps on at once augmenting the severity of its inflictions and quickening the sensibility of its victims.

There has been a good deal of discussion among critics, whether Macbeth be a truly brave man. It would really seem hardly worth the while to dispute with one who questioned either his bravery before, or his cowardice after the assassination. Indeed, no one, unless he were more or less than man, could be truly brave both before and after such a deed. Villains would not so often turn bullies, if true bravery were compatible with guilt: it is their very cowardice that transforms them into scarecrows of danger; for a bully is but a scarecrow. Real courage, as every-body knows who deserves to know it, has its chosen home in the bosom of virtue. Men of course fear death in proportion as they know they deserve it, and cleave the more fondly to life the more worthless their own guilt hath made it. It is this cowardice that goads a Macbeth and a Robespierre on to their gratuitous murders. Hence it is, too, that such man-fiends always strike first at the life of those whose virtue they think most endangers their own. The only condition upon which true bravery is possible, is that the subject have something which he prizes more than life, and the loss of which he fears more than death. Hence, perhaps, the almost universal sentiment, that courage, if not itself the highest virtue, is the condition of all the other virtues. And, sure enough, the man who values life above every thing else may be safely pronounced incapable of real virtue, however well he may succeed

in the imitation of it. And yet how often do we hear men saying now-a-days, "Nothing so dear as life, nothing so dear as life." The Lord help us, then, for we are not fit to live! Macbeth has of course emptied himself of whatever can prompt a man to risk his life, and filled himself with whatever can prompt a man to shrink from death; and the very curse of his situation is, that every removal of an apparent danger without but plants a real terror within him. Truly a more fearful or more natural condition cannot well be conceived.

In the belief that he bears a charmed life, Macbeth seeks diversion of his thoughts in scenes of outward conflict and peril, and tries to bury the disquietudes which are cutting and tearing his soul in an increased occupation of his senses. But all is in vain. He is struggling with an invisible foe; a foe which he can neither find nor escape; which is at once invulnerable and omnipresent, and every thrust at which but stabs a new torture into his own soul: which becomes the more irresistible the more he tries to subdue it, and of which he is compelled to think the more, the more he labors to forget it. His closing struggle, when, upon Macduff's disclosure respecting his own birth, he finds that the "juggling fiends have paltered with him in a double sense," and therefore knows that his hour is come, is not so much an act of courage as a paroxysm of despair. He now meets an outward visible antagonist in a conflict where strength may be met with strength; where the power of inflicting pain may be baffled by the pride of endurance; and the eye of rage may be answered by the stare of defiance, or by the fiendish grin of a desperate spasmodic resolve.

Macbeth, however, notwithstanding all the horror and reprobation his conduct excites, leaves not our pity altogether untouched. The sinkings of his soul within itself, when, as he approaches his end, he looks back upon the bloody and blasted track of his own life, bespeak some slight lingerings of a better nature. And the profound melancholy which steals over his spirit, when, upon the announcement of his wife's mysterious death and still more mysterious disease, his restless apprehension of danger gives place to a momentary retrospection of his guilt, looks as though he were at last terrified at his own remorselessness, and beginning to yearn for the repentance which he feels must be forever denied him. We see that the dawn of remorse in his soul brings with it utter despair of the least drop of relief or mitigation. Surely, if there be one ingredient in the cup of retribution more unspeakably bitter than all the rest, it must be this consciousness of guilt united with the conscious impossibility of repentance. This, I take it, is the worm that never dies, and the fire that is not to be quenched ! That these few faint sparks of goodness should have survived such a stupendous accumulation of crimes, but reveals the more impressively the greatness both of his former capacity for virtue, and of his present capacity for suffering ; thus at the same time awakening our pity for the nobleness which has been desolated, and augmenting our terror at the desolation which has passed upon it.

The respect and tenderness with which this guilty couple uniformly treat each other, is enough of itself to shield them from our hatred or scorn. This trait of their character is like an infant's eye socketed in a face

of granite. Both are patterns of conjugal virtue, ever giving and finding sympathy in each other's bosom in proportion as they are deprived of it everywhere else. For if Lady Macbeth has the ambition to urge her husband into a fiery abyss, she has also the devotion to plunge into it along with him; and she but plucks him on to the execution of a purpose which she knows he is too ambitious ever to resign, though perhaps so irresolute as to adjourn. Amid all their unspeakable wickedness they are yet without the least stain of vulgar meanness and littleness; the very intensity, indeed, of their wicked passion seems to have assoiled their minds of all the gross and frivolous incumbrances of the flesh. Their inborn greatness of character is developed, not buried, in their crimes; so that, like Milton's Satan, they appear sublime even in guilt,—majestic, though in ruins. Their innate fitness to reign is almost an excuse for their ambition, though of course not for their actions; it seems the instinct of faculty for its appropriate sphere.

In the representation of this pair, horror at the crime and pity for the criminal are blended together in unrivalled perfection. This, as Bulwer has remarked, "is a triumph of art never achieved but by the highest genius." "An inferior artist," says he, "when venturing upon the grandest stage of passion, falls into the error either of gilding over crime in order to produce sympathy for the criminal, or, in the spirit of a spurious morality, of involving both crime and criminal in a common odium." What it is thus the height of genius to picture, we know it is also the height of virtue to practise. That, in this represensation, the persons

should so terrify us without exciting our revenge, and make us hate their crimes so deeply without hating themselves; nay, that they should almost move our tears even while freezing our blood, and appear at once so frightful in their wickedness and so pitiable in their wretchedness, is really a triumph of morality no less than of art. It is thus that a genuine artist, while aiming simply at truth, becomes at the same time our best moral teacher and guide.

The tragedy of Macbeth throughout is a moral tempest. Crimes and retributions come whirling past us like the rushing of a resistless hurricane. The very prologue of the play is spoken in thunder and lightning: the moral and material worlds seem shouting and responding to each other in convulsions and cataracts. In the words of Hazlitt, "It is a huddling together of fierce extremes; a war of opposite natures, which of them shall destroy the other." Everywhere we have storms, physical and spiritual, treading on the heels of physical and spiritual calms. "There is no art to read the mind's construction in the face" either of man or of nature: To "look like the innocent flower, but be the serpent under it," seems the law alike of the persons and of their whereabouts: In both the characters and their environing reality is perpetually contradicting appearance; the stillness which awakens hope is but the gathering of the tempest to send disappointment: Nature and man seem leagued in a conspiracy to deceive the bosom's interest of whoever trusts in them; and where the most absolute trust is built, there the tooth of treachery is ready to inflict the first and fatalest bite: Where "the heaven's breath smells wooingly," where

‘the air nimbly and sweetly recommends itself unto the gentle senses,’ there the direfulest storms and murders are brewing: Where valour is punishing one treason, there ambition is concocting a greater: The very gifts which successful prowess wins turn into daggers for the heart of the giver: Unusual pleasure but invites the subject to sleep the sounder for the assassin’s blow: Ambition gripes a barren sceptre thence to be wrenched by an unlineal hand: The primrose path enchants the eye, to lead the soul “to the everlasting bonfire:” Feasts are gotten up to allure virtue into the murderer’s ambuscade: The Prince of Darkness throws out the bait of honour, to fasten his hook in his victims: Witchcraft “keeps the word of promise to the ear,” to “break it to the hope:” Slumber shuts up the senses of the body, to let out the secrets of the soul: Memory plies her spinning-wheel and shuttle, to weave the burning mantle of remorse: Imagination lends her plastic hand to body forth the apprehensions of guilty fear: Innocence makes her appearance but to remind us, that

“to do harm,
Is often laudable; to do good, sometime,
Accounted dangerous folly:”

“A falcon, towering in his pride of place,
Is by a mousing owl hawked at, and killed:”

“The heavens, as troubled with man’s act,
Threaten his bloody stage;—————
And darkness does the face of earth entomb,
When living light should kiss it:”—

Everywhere, in short, the elements of both moral and physical evil are dancing their stoutest hurlyburly and

winding up their powerfulest charm. So deep and all-pervading is the unity of interest and of purpose which Shakspeare has poured into and poured through this stupendous tragedy.

In the exciting of terror this play is truly without a parallel. Almost every scene is a masterpiece either of poetry or of philosophy, of description or character or action or passion. Of the incantation scene, the assassination scene, the banquet scene, and the sleep-walking scene, with their dagger of the mind, and Banquo of the mind, and blood-spots of the mind, no description can possibly do otherwise than misrepresent the reality. Yet, over these sublimely terrific creations there everywhere hovers a magic light of poetry, at once disclosing the horrors of the scene and attempering them within the limits of agreeable emotion. In depth and power of characterization Macbeth and Lady Macbeth are equalled only by the poet's other masterpieces,—by Shylock and Lear and Hamlet and Iago. The Weird Sisters, appearing and vanishing amid the darkness and lurid glare of the tempest as if to leave us in doubt whether they be the mothers or the daughters of the thunder-storms which attend their coming, occupy the summit of the poet's supernatural creations. Of such scenes and such beings criticism can express its conceptions only by silent amazement and awe. Even if it wield the power adequately to re-produce and re-present them to the understanding, it cannot compass the art to render them supportable. There is probably no other single work in the whole domain of art or nature, that furnishes so many and so magnificent pictures for imagi-

nation, or so many and so magnificent subjects for reflection. It forms a sort of university, where poetry has long been wont to resort for its highest inspirations, and moral philosophy for its profoundest instructions and illustrations.

LECTURE XIII.

CYMBELINE—LEAR.

CYMBELINE, though comparatively little read and less acted, is certainly one of the poet's most remarkable performances. Less grand and lofty in object and design than his great tragedies, Hamlet, Macbeth, Lear and Othello, it is not a whit behind the best of them in skill and power of execution ; it being scarcely possible to conceive how greater riches of character and poetry could be crowded into the same space. Originally written, it is said, in the first, and carefully rewritten in the last years of his authorship, it combines the excellencies of both periods ; the fresh blossoms and " mellow hangings" of his genius. The play abounds pre-eminently in the native spontaneous beauty of human nature ; most of the leading characters being composed and framed of goodness,—of goodness, too, bursting forth without or in spite of artificial education, and appearing, not in any exclusive form or upon any extraordinary occasions, but in harmonious completeness, and in the general course and service of human life. The leading purpose of the work appears to be, the trial and triumph of female honour and constancy : around which, however, are ranged various subordinate purposes, stretching over a wide extent of space and time ; while all are

set off with such fine blendings and transitions of light and shade, and grouped with such perspective power and such picturesque effect, that the very diversity of purposes serves to deepen the impression of unity: though that unity is rather felt in the general result than perceived in the details.

Though usually classed among the tragedies, *Cymbeline* does not properly fall within either of the recognized classes, but rather partakes of them all, having the plot of comedy, the passion of tragedy, and the form of history. Hazlitt very happily distinguishes it from the others as being not a tragedy, but a dramatic romance; and Mr. Verplanck (whose excellent notes I should have consulted more, had I known their value sooner) styles it "a romantic narrative, decorated with varied imagery of grace and beauty, and moralized with a liberal and practical philosophy." By throwing the scene back into a fabulous king's reign, the poet was enabled to give his work an historical form and dignity, and yet keep up the perfect freedom of a romance; while at the same time that form is in admirable keeping with the deep, solemn, and all but tragic pathos which is the prevailing sentiment of the play. A confusion of times, places and manners, where the ceremonial of old mythology and the sentiments of Christian chivalry, the heroic deeds of the earliest and the liberal ideas of the latest times, are blended together in the utmost freedom and in the order merely of inherent fitness; the play is of course replete with improbable incidents: yet that improbability is everywhere softened by the effect of distance, and even rendered grateful by the most romantic beauty, the tenderest pathos and the

most attractive wisdom. So that Cymbeline will probably appear one of the divinest or one of the absurdest things ever written, according as the reader has or has not a soul for poetry. Which sufficiently accounts for the decisive sentence some have pronounced against this "marvellous drama;" in opposition to whom the poet Campbell regards it as "perhaps the fittest in Shakspeare's whole theatre to illustrate the principle, that great dramatic genius can occasionally venture on bold improbabilities, and yet not only shrive the offence but leave us enchanted with the offender."

But there are other peculiarities in Cymbeline. Generally Shakspeare's plays are so named as to suggest, either some prominent feature of the incidents as in *Winter's Tale* and *As You Like It*, or a subordination of the characters as in *Hamlet* and *Lear*. Neither of which is the case in Cymbeline, the king himself being, in fact, so passive and quiescent that he can scarcely be called a person of the drama; for which cause the play is apt to seem inappropriately named. Duly considered, however, the name will be found every way appropriate, inasmuch as Cymbeline, in the threefold character of husband, father and king, is the centre from which all the other parts of the drama radiate, and into which they return: inactive indeed himself, he is, however, directly or indirectly, the source and spring of the entire action; the person to whom most of the others are related, around whom they revolve, from whom their motives are derived, and whom the deeds and fortunes of all immediately or remotely affect: in a word, though he says little and does less, the play finds its unity in him, and therefore properly takes his name.

Moreover, the general structure and composition of *Cymbeline* proceed mainly on a new principle and in a peculiar manner. In the plays hitherto noticed there is an obvious preponderance of contrast, in this of analogy, in the conduct of the persons ; as if the constancy of the heroine had insensibly given a cast and colouring to all the characters and movements of the drama. All the persons are equally constant and persevering in their respective courses ; the queen in her malignity, the king in his passiveness, Cloten in his importunity, Pisanio in his fidelity, Belarius in his resentment, Iachimo in his treachery, and Posthumus in his resolution to “find death.” The whole play, indeed, is a complication of the most various and conflicting intrigues ;—intrigues obstinately persisted in, yet everywhere crossing and thwarting each other : whether labouring for good or for evil ends, the persons are uniformly defeated in their schemes, yet ultimately conducted by that very defeat to better issues than themselves had contemplated ; as if on purpose to illustrate again and again, that men are not masters of their own lot : that Providence often frustrates their plans to promote their good ; sends present afflictions and disappointments upon them to make them better and happier in the end ; in short, breaks the word of promise to the ear, to keep and more than keep it to the hope. Such is the idea that runs through the play, binding its various parts into a consistent whole : if the bad succeed for a while, it is to the end that they may be at last the more effectually caught and crushed in their own toils : if the good are at first defeated and cast down, it is that they may be uplifted in the end, and “happier much by their affliction made.” Accord-

ingly, we are told in the play, that "fortune brings in some boats that are not steered;" and that "whom the gods best love, they cross; to make their gifts, the more delayed, enjoyed the more."

Cymbeline, king of Britain, had two sons and a daughter; but the sons, the one at three, the other at two years old, were stolen away from the nursery, and irrecoverably lost, the minutest search having never been able to discover the slightest trace of them; so that the princess was apparently left sole heir of the kingdom. The mother of his children having died, the king has lately married a widow, upon whom he greatly dotes, but who under a beautiful person and a virtuous seeming hides a most intriguing, restless and unprincipled spirit. Wickedly ambitious of being the mother to a line of kings, the queen, who is described as "bearing all down with her brain," and as "hourly coining plots," determines to force Imogen, the princess, into a marriage with Cloten, her son by the former husband, and "a thing too bad for bad report;" or, failing of this, to take her off by poison, and then, by practising upon the king, to work her son into the adoption of the crown. To the great joy, however, of all good men, Imogen has "referred herself unto a poor but worthy gentleman," who was bred her playfellow, and is pronounced

"A creature such

As, to seek through the regions of the earth
For one his like, there would be something failing
In him that should compare."

This gentleman, it seems, was the son of a man who, deriving his nobility from nature, had served the state

“with glory and admired success,” but who, having lost two other sons in the wars of the time, took such sorrow thereat that he died before this one was born. The mother also having deceased as he was born,

“The king, he took the babe
To his protection; called him Posthumus;
Bred him, and made him of him bedchamber:
Put him to all the learnings that his time
Could make him the receiver of; which he took,
As we do air, fast as ’twas ministered; and
In his spring became a harvest: Lived in court,
(Which rare it is to do,) most praised, most loved:
A sample to the youngest; to the more mature,
A glass that feated them; and to the graver,
A child that guided dotards.”

No sooner is the marriage known than the king, moved thereto by the queen’s setting on, to whom his judgment is wholly enthralled, imprisons the princess and sends her husband into perpetual banishment; hoping thereby to wear the print of his remembrance out of her mind. Upon taking leave of her husband Imogen,

“Who something fears her father’s wrath, but nothing,
(Always reserved her holy duty,) what
His rage can do on her,”

gives him a ring which she had of her mother, and he at the same time clasps a bracelet on her arm, as “a manacle of love.” Retiring to Rome and putting up with an old friend of his father’s, Posthumus there falls in with “yellow Iachimo,” a most insinuating atheist and picklock of female virtue, who offers to wager ten

thousand ducats against his ring, that, "provided he have admittance and opportunity to friend," he will bring away his lady's honour; at the same time assuring him, "to bar his offence herein," that he "durst attempt it against any lady in the world." Perfectly sure of the villain's repulse, and wishing an opportunity to punish his vile opinion, Posthumus accepts the wager, and gives him suitable commendations "for his more free entertainment," with the special understanding, that if he fail in the attempt he shall answer him with his sword.

It is impossible to describe the art, the address, the audacity with which this Italian devil labours to effect his purpose: after striving his utmost to persuade the lady of her husband's revolt, that he is known at Rome as the Briton reveller and libertine, wherein he succeeds so far as to make her fear "her lord has forgot Britain;" he then proceeds to offer his services in helping her to be revenged: whereupon, seeing at once to the bottom of his design, she stops his mouth by telling him,—

"Thou wrong'st a gentleman, who is as far
From thy report, as thou from honour; and
Solicit'st here a lady, that disdains thee
And the devil alike."

Despairing of success, he instantly tacks about, craves her pardon, assures her he has but spoken this to "try if her affiance were deeply rooted," and falls to praising her husband as much as he had slandered him; representing him as one,

"The truest mannered, such a holy witch,
That he enchants societies unto him:"

whereupon the lady, being as free from prudery as from dishonour, immediately receives him again to favour. But his resources are not yet exhausted : Pretending that he has a trunk filled with "plate of rare device, and jewels of rich and exquisite form," which several gentlemen, and her lord among them, have employed him to purchase as a present for the emperor, and which he is "something curious to have in safe stowage ;" he entreats of her to take them in protection : which she readily consents to do, and "pawn her honour for their safety ;" promising him, that since

" Her lord hath interest in them, she will keep them
In her bed-chamber."

The trunk being placed in her room over night, when she has fallen soundly asleep and left the candle burning, the villain himself comes out of the trunk, takes note of various things in her chamber, plucks from her arm the bracelet put there by her husband, spies a certain private mark upon her person, and then returns to his hiding place, amply furnished with means to convince her husband that he has succeeded, and so to screen himself from the forfeiture and peril of the undertaking. Being thus lied and cheated out of his faith in her honour, Posthumus, full of revengeful thoughts, immediately writes to Imogen to meet him at Milford Haven, and at the same time writes to his man Pisanio, whom he left in her service, to accompany her, to kill her by the way, and to send him certain proof that he has done so.

Meanwhile, the blustering consequential booby, Cloten, prompted alike by his strong-headed bad-hearted mother,

and by his own imbecility, continues his stupid irksome wooings: though in all else "his humour is nothing but mutation, and that from one bad thing to worse;" his chief characteristic being in fact a sort of moral and complexional Saint Vitus'-dance, so that he can never move but in jerks and spasms; here he shows the obstinacy of a conceited savage dulness. Without sentiment himself, of course he cannot understand the force of sentiment in others. A very embodiment, indeed, of ricketty-mindedness, wherein every thing is awry and askew, his will seems to go off of its own accord, without any regard to the rules of circumstantial order and propriety: heedless of what is externally fit and practicable, and mistaking his wishes for powers, what he thinks were good to be done for what he is able to do, he takes for granted, that his superior merit must ultimately prevail over the claims of his rival. While he keeps wooing, his mother with equal obstinacy continues to plot, having so completely hoodwinked the doting king that he even blames himself in the wrongs she does him, "(how finely this tyrant can tickle where she wounds!)" and so "buys her injuries," and "pays dear for her offences." Resolved either to win the lady's consent or to work her death, she orders her doctor to temper certain poisons for her, pretending that she merely wants to try them on cats and dogs, "such creatures as we count not worth the hanging," and thereby gather their several virtues and effects: but he, knowing her malice, and fearing her designs, compounds for her a drug that will only cause a show of death, "locking up the spirits a time, to be more fresh, reviving," so that,

“She is fooled
With a most false effect ; and he the truer,
So to be false with her.”

Having in vain tampered with Pisanio and tried her best to buy him over to her son's interest, she at last gives him a box filled, as she thinks, with “strange lingering poisons ;” assuring him

“It is a thing she made, which hath the king
Five times redeemed from death : she does not know
What is more cordial :”

hoping by this means to get rid of one “not to be shaken,” who is to the princess “a remembrancer, to hold the hand fast to her lord ;” and meaning to serve her the same way, “except her humour bend.”

Worried and disgusted by the importunities of

“That harsh, noble, simple, nothing,—
That Cloten, whose love-suit hath been to her
As fearful as a siege ;”

and beset with the persecutions of “a father cruel, and a step-dame false ;” the former obstinately passive and uxorious, virtually suing to be made a cat's-paw of the other's purposes ; the latter a dissembling tyrant, always kissing where she means to kill ;—“the princess, the divine Imogen,” who is as quick and sure of sight as she is upright and pure of heart ; as intelligent of the characters as she is innocent of the designs of her persecutors ; of course longs to forsake a home where she must thus

“ Abide the hourly shot
Of angry eyes ; not comforted to live,
But that there is a jewel in the world,
That she may see again :”

and therefore receives with joy the letter from her husband appointing her to meet him. She immediately orders Pisanio, a servant whom no bribes can tempt, no threats can scare from his fidelity, to put things in readiness for the journey : which being done, they steal from the court and start off together ; she wishing for “ a horse with wings,” and wondering “ how far it is to this same blessed Milford ;” he marvelling what strange infection has fallen into his master’s ear, and seeking but “ to win time to lose so bad employment” as is put upon him. Too true to his master to think of performing his orders ; knowing that

“ She undergoes,
More goddess-like than wife-like, such assaults
As would take in some virtue ;”

and confident her husband is abused, that

“ Some villain, aye, and singular in his art,
Hath done them both this cursed injury ;”

he resolves upon a course wherein he shows himself almost as cunning in virtue as the false Italian is in villainy. Having already, before starting, bethought himself of a plan, and duly provided for its execution, whereby he hopes to rule things to a favourable issue for them both, he conceals from her what he is enjoined to do, until they are within a few miles of Milford, when,

his obvious perplexity and distress awaking her anxious curiosity, he puts into her hand the letter ordering him to kill her, and assigning the reasons of the order.

Few can rightly conceive, none but a Shakspeare can fitly express, the noble agony which a woman of such delicate, sensitive honour must feel at being thus accused. Unable in her consciousness of a loyalty so often tried, so well approved, to believe that her husband himself credits his own accusation, she is now as fully persuaded of his revolt as he is of hers; that "some painted joy of Italy" has betrayed her interest and his honour; and that nothing but a wish to be rid of her could have put such a thought into his mind. In a strain eloquent alike with tender pathos and with moral wisdom, she entreats the pitying servant to do his master's bidding, who, scarcely less distressed than herself, replies by unfolding his plan :—

" You must forget to be a woman ; change
Command into obedience ; fear and niceness,
(The handmaids of all women, or, more truly,
Woman its pretty self,) into a waggish courage ;
Ready in gibes, quick-answered, saucy, and
As quarrellous as the weasel ; nay, you must
Forget that rarest treasure of your cheek,
Exposing it (but, O, the harder heart !
Alack no remedy !) to the greedy touch
Of common-kissing Titan ; and forget
Your laboursome and dainty trims, wherein
You made great Juno angry."

The Roman ambassador, having lately arrived in Britain to demand the tribute which Cymbeline at the queen's instigation has for some time withheld, is expected to

pass that way on his return. Forethinking this, the indefatigable Pisanio has brought along "fit doublet, hat, hose, all that answer to them," with the intent that his mistress may present herself in the disguise of a page before the noble Roman,

"Desire his service, tell him
Wherein she's happy, (which she'll make him know,
If that his head have ear in music;")

and thus be enabled to tread a course

"Haply near
The residence of Posthumus; so nigh, at least,
That though his actions be not visible, yet
Report shall render him hourly to her ear,
As truly as he moves."

Meanwhile, as she disguises her person in order to appear hereafter what she is, so, for the same purpose, the servant is to disguise his character; to be true in a greater, both are to become false in a less:—

"He'll give but notice she is dead, and send
Some bloody sign of it; for 'tis commanded
He should do so: She will be missed at court,
And that will well confirm it."

Having thus fitted her out and instructed her the best he can in the part she is to act, he gives her the box of compounds which he had of the queen, assuring her, that

"What's in't is precious; if she's sick at sea,
Or stomach-qualmed at land, a dram of this
Will drive away distemper;"

and, commending her to the best direction of the gods, takes leave of her for a while,

“ Lest, being missed, he be suspected of
Her carriage from the court.”

Being thus left alone, Imogen travels on in likeness of a boy until, overcome with hunger and fatigue, she finds her way into a cave inhabited by an old man and two boys, and, the occupants being out on a hunt, helps herself to the food they have left. Returning presently from their chase, the old man and his boys are amazed and charmed at sight of the lovely visitor ;—

“ But that it eats their victuals, they would think
Here were a fairy.”

While they, equally surprised and delighted, are exclaiming among themselves,

“ By Jupiter, an angel ! or, if not,
An earthly paragon ! Behold divineness
No elder than a boy !

she, mistaking their admiration for anger, and “measuring their good minds by the rude place they live in,” falls to begging for her life. Touched to the heart by her sweet looks and sweeter speech, the two boys immediately declare, in words of the most enchanting tenderness, a fast friendship for the gentle stranger, and crave to cherish and entertain her as their brother : while she, no less affected by their unbought gentleness, begins to wish they were her father’s sons, and, “since her husband is false, she’d change her sex to be companion with

them." The longer she stays the more they love her, and are more charmed than ever when they learn "how angel-like he sings," how "neat his cookery, as Juno had been sick, and he her dieter," and "how nobly he yokes a smiling with a sigh." Left in the cave to act the housewife while they are gone out to hunt, she falls sick in their absence, and seeks relief from the box given her by Pisanio, which presently works upon her the form of death. Returning from the chase, they find to their inexpressible sorrow, that "the bird is dead that they have made so much on," and, in some of the sweetest saddest strains that ever ear received, they sing her to the ground, and strew her grave with flowers.

Cloten in the last and most irksome of his addresses to Imogen having fallen to abusing her husband, she effectually choked him off by replying ;

"He never can meet more mischance than come
To be but named of thee. The meanest garment
That ever hath but clipped his body, is dearer
In my respect than all the hairs above thee,
Were they all made such men."

Enraged at this repulse, the valiant booby went to meditating the direfulest revenge against both her and Posthumus. Upon Pisanio's reappearance at court, "lord Cloten" came to him with sword drawn, foaming at the mouth, and threatening him with instant death, unless he disclosed which way his mistress was gone. Seeing no other escape, Pisanio at last gave him a feigned letter of his master's which was then in his pocket, and which directed him to seek her on the mountains near to Milford ; trusting that "what he learned thereby would

prove his travel, not her danger." Having enforced from the faithful servant a suit of his master's clothes, "the same suit he wore when he took leave of my lady and mistress," this walking lump of chaos started off in quest of her, "with unchaste purpose and with oath to violate her honour." He arrives near the cave of our gentle foresters just as they are coming back from the chase, and before they have learnt what has befallen the "fair youth" whom they left within. Meeting one of the boys, he immediately announces himself as Cloten, son to the queen, and, still mistaking what he would for what he can, proposes to take off the young man's head, and "set it on the gates of Lud's town," as that of a robber and outlaw. Unambitious of such promotion, the rustic mountaineer cheerfully enters his lordship's service, and quickly disencumbers him of *his* head, which he throws into a stream near by, "and lets it to the sea, to tell the fishes he's the queen's son Cloten." Alarmed on coming up and finding what has happened, the old man tries in vain to persuade the boys that they have cause for fear: while the one rejoices in what he has done, the other envies him the doing of it; but their joy is quickly turned to mourning, and "Cloten is quite forgot," when, upon entering the rock, they discover what has happened there. Reminded, however, by the old man, that

"Reverence,

That angel of the world, doth make distinction
Of place 'tween high and low,"

the boys consent, that their "princely foe" may share the same grave and the same obsequies with their gentle visitor.

Upon awaking from her death-like trance, Imogen mistakes the headless trunk lying beside her, clad in the garments of Posthumus, for her husband, whom she is now convinced that Pisanio "hath conspired with that irregulous devil, Cloten," to murder, and is confirmed herein by the effects of the drug he gave her, calling it precious and cordial. Reclining her head upon the body to weep and pray, she is found in that condition by the Roman general, the same that was lately the imperial ambassador, and who now comes with war, to enforce the tribute which Cymbeline persists in withholding. Won by her sad complaining and fond fidelity to what she calls her slain master, he immediately takes the seeming boy into his service, and "rather fathers him than masters him."

No sooner does Posthumus receive the notice and the bloody sign of Imogen's death than his revenge gives way to penitence and remorse. Though fully convinced that she was false to him, still her fault seems small beside his own; and he forgets the wrong he has suffered in that he has done; reflecting, apparently for the first time, "how many married men, if all should take his course, must murder wives much better than themselves." He now blames Pisanio for performing his orders, never dreaming that the faithful servant would be false to him only to be the truer. Groaning under the burden of his conscience and weary of a life stained with such an act, he enlists into the army levied against Britain. Once more upon his native soil, he quickly resolves what to do:—

"I am brought hither
Among the Italian gentry, and to fight

Against my lady's kingdom : 'Tis enough
That, Britain, I have killed thy mistress ; peace !
I'll give no wound to thee. Therefore, good heavens,
Hear patiently my purpose : I'll disrobe me
Of these Italian weeds, and suit myself
As does a Briton peasant : so I'll fight,
Against the part I come with ; so I'll die
For thee, O Imogen, even for whom my life
Is, every breath, a death : and thus unknown,
Pitied, nor hated, to the face of peril
Myself I'll dedicate."

Meanwhile our two young mountaineers, impatient of a life "locked up from action and adventure," the sparks of nature being kindled in them by the noise of war, resolve to share the perils and the glories of their countrymen. In vain does the old man endeavour to dissuade them : prompted by heroic impulses and thirsting for heroic exploits,

"They are ashamed
To look upon the holy sun, to have
The benefit of his blessed beams, remaining
So long a poor unknown."

At last, finding that the more he sets before them the danger of going the more they long to go, the veteran hero determines, come what may, to accompany them.

Among the Italian gentry and as their leader, "bold Iachimo" likewise embarks in the war, urged thither, as would seem, by a troubled spirit and disquiet mind, which disqualify and indispose him for the work of his profession. In the disguise of a poor soldier, Posthumus soon meets him there, and, after vanquishing and dis-

arming him, leaves him alone with his crimes. As, to the guilty, all reverses naturally seem revenges, so to him,—

“The heaviness and guilt within my bosom
Takes off my manhood : I have belied a lady,
The princess of this country, and the air on’t
Revengingly enfeebles me : Or could this carl,
A very drudge of nature’s, have subdued me ?”

Thus all the surviving persons of the drama, except the queen, who is sick unto death of “a fever with the absence of her son,” are brought together on the field of battle. When the Romans have all but won the day, the king’s army being everywhere broken, and his soldiers all flying, “an ancient soldier with two striplings,” assisted by “a fourth man in a silly habit,” appearing in the thickest of the fight, turn the fortune of the day, and change the rout into a triumph, taking the Roman general, his lovely page, and Iachimo prisoners. But Posthumus,

“In his own woe charmed,
Could not find death, where he did hear him groan,
Nor feel him where he struck ;”

for which cause, the fight being done, he immediately resumes the part he came in, to the end that he may be taken by the Britons, and as a prisoner meet the death which seems to fly him. In this condition he is found and seized according to his wishes, and doomed along with the other captives to suffer what he seeks. When the king proceeds to honour and reward his heroic deliverers, he grieves to learn,

“That the poor soldier, that so richly fought,
Whose rags shamed gilded arms, whose naked breast
Stepped before targe of proof, cannot be found.”

The prisoners being brought before the king to receive their sentence, the noble Roman begs but the life of “his boy, a Briton born,” assuring him that

“Never master had
A page so kind, so duteous, diligent,
So tender over his occasions, true,
So feat, so nurselike.”

Charmed with the boy's looks, and confident he has seen them before, the king, he knows not why or wherefore, bids him live, and, ask what boon he will, it shall be granted. The boon he craves is, that the king will call upon Iachimo to “render of whom he had that ring.” “Glad to be constrained to utter that which torments him to conceal,” Iachimo immediately lays open his whole course of villany; a disclosure equally fraught with relief to Imogen, who thought her husband's heart had been stolen from her, and with despair to Posthumus, who still supposes that his cruel orders were performed. Rushing forward in a frenzy of grief and rage, he at once declares himself the murderer of Imogen, and invokes all kinds of shames, mischiefs, torments upon himself for the crime; never dreaming that she is still alive, until, upon his striking the ransomed boy for interrupting him, Pisanio, who of course recognizes his beloved mistress in the clothes he had himself provided for her, springs forward and tells his master, that “he ne'er killed Imogen till now.” All this while

the old man and his two boys stand wrapt in wonder, not more at what is taking place before them, than at the sight of that "sweet rosy lad," who seems to them "the same dead thing alive," whose sad grave they had so lately watered with tears and sweetened with flowers; until Imogen cries out against Pisanio for having poisoned her, when the noble servant protests his innocence, and the crafty honest doctor, who is also a spectator of the scene, confirms his speech, by explaining the nature of the drug and why he had prepared it.

Meanwhile the wicked queen has died, and the spells she has so long exercised over the king are broken; she, made desperate and shameless by her son's strange absence, in whom all her wicked schemes and hopes are wrecked, so that she can reap nothing from her crimes but the guilt of them, having "opened in despite of heaven and men her purposes," and having "repented that the evils she had hatched were not effected." Upon the king's wondering what has become of Cloten, Pisanio, now that fear is from him, relates the manner and purpose of his departure; and one of the boys puts an end to the suspense by declaring that he cut off his head: whereupon the king immediately condemns the valiant youth to death for having killed a prince; which compels the ancient soldier to disclose who himself and the two striplings are.

Many years before he was known and honoured as one of the truest, wisest, bravest best servants of his king and country. Being falsely accused and unjustly banished as a traitor, he had in revenge stolen away the king's two sons, and, retiring to the mountain-fastnesses, where we first found him, had brought them up as his

own children. Pursuing merely his revenge, he has but conferred the greatest of blessings, having saved the princes from the seductions of the court, and from the machinations of the queen: thinking to bar the king of succession, as the king had reft him of his lands, he has but reared up for him the worthier successors; their nobility of nature having thriven the more for the lowliness of their estate. He now presents the king his sons again, not more rejoiced at what his country will gain, than grieved at what he himself must lose, by the gift.

Overjoyed at this disclosure, the king resolves to let those in bonds be joyful too; still remembering, however,

“The forlorn soldier, that so nobly fought,
Who would have well become this place, and graced
The thankings of a king;”

which draws from Posthumus, since he has found her alive for whom he had resolved to die, a confession that he is himself the man. By this time all cruel and revengeful thoughts are dead in him; the sufferings and remorse, into which they have betrayed him, having been to him a discipline of humanity. Upon his wild yet noble stock of pride affliction has ingrafted mild humility: he has read the condemnation of his own vindictive passions in the faults and follies into which they have hurried him: the rash plotting and ordering of his wife's death has entailed upon him a revenue of shame, regret and self-reproach, which, taming whatever was dark and fierce, but cherishing whatever was pure, gentle, humane and heroic, in his nature, has at last rendered him truly worthy of her. Accordingly, when

Iachimo, kneeling, begs of him to "take the life so often due;" reading in the suppliant's desire to die the proof, that he too has become another man; that the stern awful voice of self reproach has turned his very crimes into a discipline of truth and virtue, and thus made him fit to live; he replies;—

"Kneel not to me:

The power that I have on you, is to spare you;
The malice towards you, to forgive you; live,
And deal with others better."

Hearing this, the king "learns freeness of a son-in-law," and "pardon is the word to all." As the instigations of his seeming-virtuous queen had caused him to withhold the tribute from Rome, and thereby involved him in this war; so now, thinking with horror on her wicked machinations and her desperate end, he resolves, although the victor, to submit to Cesar and to pay the wonted tribute from which she had dissuaded him; thus undoing, through hatred of her dead, the only good act she had ever prompted him to while living. Taught piety by a series of events in which the hand of Providence is so visible, the king then proclaims a day of sacrifice and thanksgiving to the gods; commands to "let the crooked smokes climb to their nostrils from our bless'd altars;" proceeds to knit and ratify a peace in their temples; and orders that "the Roman and the British ensigns wave friendly together."

Such is the strange complication of intrigues, adventures and incidents, that makes up this strangely-beautiful drama. Though bristling throughout with resolves and deeds, yet all of them miscarry, all of them fail. The

very prevalence, indeed, of what we call chance over human design, is what gives the work such a wild, romantic, and legendary character ; it makes the impression of some mysterious, supernatural power putting to confusion the works of men, that its own agency may be the more manifest in the order that finally succeeds. Such is the sympathy between the marvellous fictions of old romance and that faith which is the evidence of things not seen

IMOGEN.

IN Imogen not a single trait or line of female excellence is omitted. As if on purpose that he might the better depict a model of a perfect wife, the poet cuts and keeps her out of all the other relations of life through most of the play. Already a wife when we first see her, she acts but as a wife while we see her ; yet in this one character she approves herself the mistress of all womanly perfections, such as would enrich the life and make glad the heart of whoever stood in any way related to her. That her attractions may the more appear to be in herself, not in the feeling of others, that is, in her character, not in her sex, even her womanhood is hidden from those about her : but, without any of the advantages that would accrue to her from its being known what she is ; disrobed of all the poetry and divinity with which every right-minded man invests the form of woman ; still her sweet perfections are irresistible, and she kindles a gentle, holy affection, in every one that meets and speaks with her. Hazlitt, with characteristic liveliness

and obliquity of criticism, says "Posthumus is only interesting from the interest she takes in him, and she is only interesting herself from her tenderness and constancy to her husband." If this be true, how is it that she so quickly and so effectually wins and wears the hearts of those who know not, who suspect not, who or what she is? In truth, the "sweet rosy lad," and the "page so kind, so duteous, diligent," seem scarcely less interesting, though in a different sort, than the lady, the princess, or the wife. But is it to us, not to the other characters, that she is interesting only as a wife? Nay, much of our interest in her as a wife, and even as a woman, comes from the interest they take in her as a sad, sweet, lovely boy. But if it be meant, that it is only while acting from the feelings and duties of the wife, that she displays the soft attractive graces of her character; of this there can be no question, for she is not brought before us acting from any other sentiment. Yet who that looks upon her as she is or as she seems, but feels,

"What joy to hear thee, and to see!
Thy elder brother I would be,
Thy father—any thing to thee!"

Imogen has all of Portia's intelligence without any of Portia's effort or art. Portia always tries to be wise and always succeeds; Imogen always succeeds equally well without trying; and her wisdom is better than Portia's inasmuch as, springing rather from nature than from reflection, and seated more in the heart than in the understanding, it comes forth in word and act so freely, so easily, and spontaneously, that she herself takes no

thought of it. It is this wise-heartedness, or rather this perfect sympathy between head and heart, that enables her to anticipate, and utter without experience, what her husband, and what most men would seem wise enough in learning from experience. In her reason for not giving way to revenge,—

“Though those that are betrayed
Do feel the treason sharply, yet the traitor
Stands in worse case of woe,”—

is taught the self-same doctrine which her husband as most men would be, is brought to know only by the shames and remorse consequent upon his revenge. And, indeed, how divinely she everywhere talks! yet not more divinely than she acts.

And she is as spirited, withal, as intelligent, whensoever duty bids, or does not forbid, her to be so. It is almost as dangerous, indeed, to offend, as it is delightful to please her. Her anger is very hard to arouse; but woe to the man that does arouse it. Notwithstanding her many trials and vexations, though pursued by cunning malice and “spighted with a fool,” the calm sweetness of her temper is ruffled but twice, and that is when duty to her husband and to her own honour requires it. In both cases her anger is like a flash of lightning, brief, but sure; it lasts but an instant, yet leaves nothing to be done. Not even the stupidity of Cloten is proof against her scorching rebukes when her spirit is up. It is impossible to mistake her meaning; when she speaks, every word goes right to the spot; and her quick keen rebuffs crack on the feelings and sting like a whip. On the whole it is not advisable to provoke her too far.

Of Imogen's personal beauty, her "white and azure, laced with blue of heaven's own tinct," we never think at all save when others are speaking of it : when she is before us we do not and cannot regard it, because she herself regards it not ; and when she speaks the riches of her mind and character leave us no thought to bestow on her person. And the same is the case with her disguise ; she does not think and we do not think of it at all : wholly absorbed in her sorrow, she neither tries nor fears to act the part she has assumed,—neither tries, like *Rosalind*, to hide her sex from others, nor fears, like *Viola*, to wrong it to herself : whether she observes the outward properties of her sex or not, she neither knows nor lets us know ; she is raised and raises us not only above them, but above the thought of them : they are lost alike to her and to us in the intense yet subdued pathos of her condition,—a pathos literally too deep for tears, and which our minds could hardly support but for the riches it unfolds in her character.

But it is useless to dwell upon, it is impossible to exhaust the beauty of Imogen. Throughout the play "there seems a glory round about us, and she the angel of the vision ;" the perfusive vivifying grace of her character irradiating the whole drama, and stealing upon us from every object we meet. The entire play is full of the divinest poetry, and it is nearly all inspired by her, except what she herself utters and is. Other of the poet's heroines, especially *Miranda* and *Cordelia*, are equally fine, if not finer, in the conception ; but none of them is so fully, so exquisitely developed : she is all or nearly all that woman can be, or ought to be ; and we are given to see and feel all that she is. Perhaps she does

not strike the imagination quite so forcibly as Miranda, nor touch the heart quite so deeply as Cordelia ; but she makes up the account in that she combines, as far as seems possible, the interest of both.

POSTHUMUS.

OF course a husband worthy of Imogen could not be fully delineated in the same play. Besides, the nature of the poet's design obviously required Posthumus to be kept in the background ; and many, thinking him a central figure, have mistaken his distance for littleness. He could not be in the centre of the picture without staying beside Imogen ; if he stayed there, he could not be lied out of his faith in her ; and had he retained his faith, there had been no chance to try and prove her constancy and honour. Hence the necessity of putting so much concerning him into the mouths of the other characters ; and how rich are their tongues with the odour of his virtues ! And indeed, who will presume to question the judgment, who shall dare refuse to ratify the choice of such a woman as Imogen ? For, as Campbell says, " she hallows to the imagination every thing that loves her, and that she loves in return."

"Her own price
Proclaims how she esteem'd him and his virtue ;
By her election may be truly read,
What kind of man he is."

It is one of the poet's highest merits as a dramatist, that while making his characters utter themselves, he at the

same time makes them mirror each other. Being forced to put Posthumus where we could not distinctly see him, the best thing he could do was, to give us a reflection of him from Imogen; and if we distrust that reflection, confirmed as it is by other voices, the fault assuredly is our own; her well approved wisdom and insight being a sufficient pledge and guaranty of his worth. If his wager seem foolish, it is surely a folly for which no woman will think the less of him, as it springs from his chivalrous confidence in the virtue, and his chivalrous desire to vindicate the honour, of the sex. The manly awe of womanhood, with which Imogen has inspired him, makes his sword to stir in the scabbard, as he hears the infidel's mean and malignant aspersions.

CLOTEN.

CLOTEN is a remarkable instance of a man or a thing, in whom, as we should say, not merely one but all the screws are loose. There are the materials of a man in him, but they are not made up, not composed: his whole nature seems a mass of unhingement, disorder and jumble, full of unaccountable jerks, twitches and snatches; every thing is ajar, every thing out of its place; no two of the parts will pull together, no two of them will act at the same time. With some shrewdness, some mind, he has, however, properly speaking, no sense; hence the ludicrous, exquisite unfitness of all that he does and most that he says; thus exemplifying that folly quite as often springs from a want of sentiment as from a want of understanding. Always acting, often speaking like a fool;

rude, rough, boisterous, vain, conceited, ambitious, malignant, mistaking the capacities of his place for his capacity to fill them, the conception of deeds for ability to do them; savage in feeling, awkward in person, absurd in manners; he is just the last man that a lady of sense or sensibility could be brought to endure. The character was for a long time thought to be monstrous, altogether out of the pale or the possibility of nature. But Miss Seward assures us, in one of her letters, that singular as Cloten may appear, he is the exact prototype of a man she once knew:—"The unmeaning frown of the countenance; the shuffling gait; the burst of voice; the bustling insignificance; the fever-and-ague fits of valour; the froward tetchiness; the unprincipled malice; and, what is most curious, the occasional gleams of good sense amid the floating clouds of folly which generally darkened and confused the man's brain, and which, in Cloten, we are apt to impute to a violation of unity of character: but in the sometime Captain C——n I saw the portrait of Cloten was not out of nature." So that in this instance, it would seem that Shakspeare made the original, and nature imitated him!

IACHIMO.

THE delineation of Iachimo finely exemplifies the poet's fidelity to the moral constitution of man and the moral history of men; representing conscience as finally startled from an apparently hopeless lethargy by excess of crime, so that the subject passes from extreme guilt, and even because it is extreme, to remorse and

repentance, and finally through them to virtue and peace. From the very honour which he so vainly and wickedly attempts, he derives an impression that will not suffer his soul to rest under the treachery whereby he still more wickedly screens his failure ; and the jewel which he bears away as proof of his having done what he could not do, becomes but a whip of scorpions to him, the fatallest remembrancer both of the " heavenly angel " he has wronged and of the hellish wrong he has done her.

BELARIUS AND THE PRINCES.

IN the two princes Shakspeare has again shown his preference of the innate to the acquired ; if, indeed, any one may venture to affirm what is innate and what acquired, where have fallen the instructions of the veteran sage and hero whom they call father, and who is himself a combination of whatever is lovely in youth and whatever is venerable in age. From his lips they have drunk in the lore of virtue and wisdom ; all the genial and generous aptitudes of their nature have been fed and fostered not less by the stories of his life than by the aspects and influences of their mountain home. The tales that he has told them have but awakened in them a desire to be like him when they are old ; and that desire but prompts them to go where he has been, to see what he has seen, and to do as he has done. They have in him all the benefits society can yield without any of its banes : its good he has brought with him, its evil he has left behind ; and observe, withal, that they have seen but the best of him, having known him only

“Where he has lived at honest freedom ; paid
More pious debts to heaven than in all
The fore-end of his time.”

All his arguments to dissuade them from going forth into the world are refuted by his own noble character : they cannot be content to live away from scenes where such riches are to be had. No wonder, therefore, that,

“Though trained up thus meanly
I’ the cave, wherein they bow, their thoughts do hit
The roofs of palaces.”

Whether the wisdom of experience in him, or the wisdom of nature in them, show more divinely, is hard to tell ; both are equally beautiful in their way, both equally becoming their place ; and if they have been to him the best of materials to work upon, he has been to them the best of workmen.

“Stoop, boys : this gate
Instructs you how to adore the heavens, and bows you
To morning’s holy office : The gates of monarchs
Are arched so high, that giants may jet through,
And keep their impious turbans on, without
Good-morrow to the sun.—Hail, thou fair heaven !
We house i’ the rock, yet use thee not so hardly
As prouder livers do :”—

such is the style of his lessons to them. Thus, except themselves, truth, piety, gentleness and heroism are the only inmates of their rocky dwelling. Love and reverence, the principles of whatever is greatest and best in human character, have grown up from their hearts in happy, healthy proportion, and indissolubly wedded them-

selves to the simple majestic forms of nature around them. It is not strange, therefore, that we should behold in them the lion and the lamb lying down in gentleness together.

“O thou goddess,
Thou divine Nature, how thyself thou blazon'st
In these two princely boys. They are as gentle
As zephyrs, blowing below the violet,
Not wagging his sweet head : and yet as rough,
Their royal blood enchafed, as the rud'st wind,
That by the top doth take the mountain-pine,
And make him stoop to the vale. 'Tis wonderful,
That an invisible instinct should frame them
To royalty unlearned ; honour untaught ;
Civility not seen from other ; valour,
That wildly grows in them, but yields a crop
As if it had been sowed.”

And how inexpressibly tender and sweet is the pathos that mingles in their solemnities round the grassy tomb of their gentle visitor, supposed to be dead !

“With fairest flowers,
While summer lasts, and I live here, Fidele,
I'll sweeten thy sad grave : Thou shalt not lack
The flower, that's like thy face, pale primrose ;
The azure harebell, like thy veins ; no, nor
The leaf of eglantine, which, not to slander,
Out-sweetened not thy breath : the ruddock would,
With charitable bill, bring thee all this ;
Yea, and furred moss besides, when flowers are none,
To winter-ground thy corse.”

But indeed, of these forest scenes, especially when enriched with Imogen, it is impossible to speak with any sort of justice. Whatever is most poetical in sentiment,

manners and character is with indescribable delicacy breathed into them ; and it is hard to say, whether they are more beholden for their grace to the heroic veteran, the two princely boys, or the "fair youth" that has strayed amongst them,

" A lovely apparition sent
To be a moment's ornament."

It is hardly too much, indeed, to say, that whatever is most beautiful elsewhere in the poet's works is imaged here in happier beauty : and when the youthful dwellers in the mountain and the rock, awed and melted by the occasion, weep and warble over the grave of that "blessed thing," that seems to have dropped down from heaven merely to win their love and vanish ; the scene, one would think, must "give to the most deadened imagination a new life for poetry." Improbable as are the incidents of these scenes, he is truly to be pitied who can think of that improbability amid such ineffable beauties.

TRAGEDY OF LEAR.

COLERIDGE somewhere says concerning the tragedy of Lear, that he cannot reconcile the scene where Gloucester's eyes are dug out to his ideas of human nature. But, he continues, I once thought many things in Shakspeare unnatural, of which subsequent experience and reflection have taught me the naturalness ; and, had I his insight, perhaps I should see perfect truth where I now see nothing but the reverse. Had all the poet's critics equalled Coleridge in modesty and ability, how many

profound critical ineptitudes and impertinences might we not have been spared !

Tried by the rule, or even by the exceptions, of what we are used to see, Lear will probably seem full of unnatural things. Measuring, indeed, the capacities of nature by the standard of our own observations, we shall find all the higher representations of art, and even many well authenticated accounts of history, too extravagant for belief. "Truth is stranger than fiction." We often speak of civilization as adapted to unfold the innate peculiarities of men ; whereas it probably rather obstructs than aids the development of nature, by subjecting all to the stamp of a common impression. In what is called the heroic age of the world, when men, comparatively exempt from conventional motives and restraints, were left to the full free outgrowth of what was within them, they doubtless exhibited a far greater diversity of character, became both much better and much worse, than we have found, or can well conceive them to be. In short, living amid the refinement and uniformity of highly civilized society, we can hardly credit that rankness of growth, those great crimes and great virtues, which are recorded of earlier barbarous times, and which form the materials of deep tragedy.—While we are amid Shakspeare's scenes and subject to his power, he seems to enlarge, not contradict, our knowledge of nature : but when we fall back upon our own observations, and compare his exhibitions with our experiences, he seems to have rather enchanted us with illusions than instructed us with realities.

The tragedy of Lear seems written on purpose to exemplify the virtues and vices of a barbarous age. The

loose waggish discourse of Gloster in the opening scene, where we have the spirit of a gentleman and the manners of a rowdy; the general belief, that “from the operations of the orbs we do exist and cease to be,”—a belief that “makes guilty of human disasters the sun, the moon, and the stars;” the tyranny of imagination acting as the organ of conscience, which puts an ominous meaning into the mouth of unusual events, and construes the unknown or unfamiliar utterances of nature into moral threatenings,—thus generating superstitious fears in all minds but such as are sunk below or seared up against them; the

“proof and precedent

Of Bedlam beggars, who, with roaring voices,
Strike in their numbed and mortified bare arms
Pins, wooden pricks, nails, sprigs of rosemary;—

all these things serve to remind us, that we are walking amid the twilight of semi-savage life. Moreover, the play exhibits throughout an extreme diversity of character, a violent antipathy and antithesis of moral complexion, and especially a boldness, a gratuitousness, a lustihood in crime, which the order of civilization would as little produce as tolerate. Such spontaneous out-comings of wicked impulse, such redundant transpirations of original sin, could spring up only in default of conventional inducements either to put off the show of what is, or put on the show of what is not. The process of civilization, if it do not crush or kill out the tendencies to such crimes, at least involves a constant discipline of prudence, which keeps them in a more decent, politic reserve. With so many mouths ready to

toss back their offences upon their own heads, men are forced either to hold their vices in abeyance, or, if they must let them out, to sugar them over with some semblance of virtue to make them go down.

In the tragedy of Lear the poet seems to have laid all his faculties under contribution to celebrate the divinity of sorrow. Accordingly, as Hamlet exhausts the resources of human thought, and Macbeth of human action, so Lear exhausts the resources of human pity.

An old, old man, uniting in himself the sacred characters of king and father, intent

“To shake all cares and business from his age,
Conferring them on younger strengths, while he
Unburdened crawls toward death,”

resolves to portion out the kingdom among his three daughters. Tender by nature, but rendered testy by age and privilege of station; swayed by that excessive fondness which is the dotage of strong affection; and impelled by that intense yearning for violent professions of love, which marks the selfishness of a generous and loving nature,—he calls them together, and questions them into a rivalry of love,

“That he his largest bounty may extend
Where merit most doth challenge it.”

Deceived by the hypocritical pretensions of the elder two daughters, whose love, being confined to the head, comes out altogether in speech; and irritated at the comparative silence of the third, whose love, seated in the heart, expresses itself in action,—he disinherits and

disowns the latter, and divides the portion intended for her between her two sisters :

“ Invests them jointly with his power,
Pre-eminence, and all the large effects,
That troop with majesty ; himself, by monthly course,
With reservation of a hundred knights,
By them to be sustained, and his abode
Make with them by due turns ; only retaining still
The name and all the additions to a king.”

Thus far Lear, exhibiting but “ the imperfections of long-engrafted condition, and, therewithal, the unruly waywardness which infirm and choleric years bring with them,” moves little feeling in us but resentment and indignation. Thenceforward he comes before us but to “ loosen the springs of pity in our eyes ;” and we forget his faults in his misfortunes, or refuse to think of them save as occasions of his distress. For, no sooner have the two favoured daughters made sure of their object, than their rivalry of love turns into a rivalry of ingratitude : under pretence of reforming the wayward old king, they begin forthwith to scant their duties towards him ; to hunt up reasons for abridging his comforts, and abating his train ; to “ look black upon him ;” to “ strike him with their tongue, most serpent-like, upon the very heart ;” as if of set purpose to make him feel

“ How sharper than a serpent’s tooth it is,
To have a thankless child.”

Having thus wronged him, having “ tied sharp-toothed unkindness, like a vulture,” at his heart, they then proceed to hate and persecute him ; they turn him out of

doors, abandon him to the fury of the conspiring elements, and even plot his death. With invincible resolution he bears up against external evils, "the warring winds" and "the deep dread-bolted thunder," nay, even seeks them, since they

"will not give him leave to ponder
On things would hurt him more ;"

until his energies are undermined from within, and his nature sinks crushed and crazed by

"the tempest in his mind,
That from his senses takes all feeling else
Save what beats there ;"

when she so lately "dowered with his curse and strangled with his oath," comes to his relief, and with her love

"Repairs those violent harms that her two sisters
Have in his reverence made."

Such are the events upon which the interest mainly turns ; and however far-fetched and improbable these events may appear, the sentiments and emotions, which make up the staple of the play, are as universal and indestructible as human nature itself ; such as always have been and always must be most close and native to the heart of man.

Within and subordinate to this plot is another, forming a sort of tragedy within a tragedy ; the two setting forth a sovereign and a subject family torn to pieces and finally ruined by similar evils, as if on purpose to

accredit the prevailing superstition, that "men are knaves, thieves, and treachers by spherical predominance; drunkards, liars, and adulterers, by an enforced obedience of planetary influence; and all that they are evil in, by a divine thrusting on." As, in actual life, men in the exercise of present virtues often incur the evils consequent upon their former vices; so, in Lear, the perverse self-willed habit of preferring lip-service and glib-tongued flattery to silent obedience, as a test of love, is visited upon him in the hypocrisy and ingratitude of his daughters; and, in Gloster, the vices of his youth and his criminal levity in talking about them, are visited upon him in the light-hearted, gamesome treachery and subtlety of his natural son. Yet both the sufferers are justly represented as men "more sinned against than sinning." For here again, as in actual life, the vices of some are the occasion of still greater vices in others; while, as if to cut off all excuse from the more vicious, the same occasion is seen ministering to the noblest and loveliest virtue; the goodness of Cordelia and Edgar being only tried and purified by the self-same causes that operate to deprave Goneril, Regan and Edmund. But, while these two families are thus destroyed by intestine evils,—evils that have long been maturing the fruits of sorrow and woe;—a kind and tender father driven mad by the cruelty of daughters whom he has only loved; and a noble and loyal son driven to feign madness by the credulity of an erring father, and the perfidious plotting of a brother whom he has never wronged;—these prolific evils by no means stop at their origin, but immediately spread themselves over those most innocent of them: Gloster's

greatest calamities, originating in the malice of Goneril and Regan, overtake him in the perilous exercise of loyalty and fidelity to the king; Edmund is drawn still deeper into crime by the lust and treachery of those wicked women, and so hardened and prepared for the murdering of Lear and Cordelia; while the generous Kent and loving Fool, the persons that have least hand in this grand carnival of guilt, die of mere grief at the sufferings and death of those whom they love.

Such is the complex and intricate, but not obscure web and entanglement of virtue and vice, of divinity and depravity, which forms the groundwork of this, I think, the greatest and noblest achievement of the greatest and noblest of poets.

GONERIL AND REGAN.

THERE is no accounting for the conduct of Goneril and Regan but by supposing a thorough fiendishness of nature, a very instinct and impulse of malignity. With but little of soul, and with that little concentrated in the head, they have no heart to guide and inspire their understanding, and but just enough of understanding to seize occasions and frame excuses for their heartlessness. Without affection, they are also without shame, and have barely enough of human blood in their veins to quicken and fertilize the brain, without sending a blush to the cheek. Hypocritical for certain definite aims, there is withal a boldness and impudence in their hypocrisy, incompatible with the least regard for conventional decorum. With the instinctive cunning of

selfishness, a sort of hell-inspired tact, they feel their way to a fit occasion, but drop the mask as soon as they have gained their ends ; so that we hardly know which to admire most, that they should have revealed themselves to the king no sooner, or that they should have concealed themselves from him no longer. No touch of nature, no gush of emotion can find its way into or out of their bosoms. There is a smoothe glib rhetoric in their professions, unsweetened with the least infusion of feeling, and a dry, hard, icy alertness of thought and speech in what afterwards comes from them, which is almost terrific, and which burns an impression into our minds from its very coldness. They seem to have something within that turns the very milk of humanity into venom, which all the wounds they inflict are but occasions for casting. No atmosphere of delight can abide their presence ; an unmitigated horror uniformly attends their coming. Regan's reply to her father's "I gave you all," "and in good time you gave it," displays a wantonness and intrepidity of malice which fairly chills and stiffens the blood in our veins.

To alleviate the improbability of such treatment of their father Goneril, and Regan are brought forward in other relations. But degrees of kin bring no difference of cruelty : perhaps, indeed, such a causeless malice does not admit of degrees, but seizes indifferently on all opportunities to vent itself. Selfishness reigns in them to such an extent as to make all objects seem equidistant from self ; and Edmund is the only person in the play who is wicked enough and energetic enough in his wickedness, to interest their feelings. It is difficult to think of them otherwise than merely as instruments of

the plot ; not so much ungrateful persons as personifications of ingratitude : and it seems more incredible, that such beings should exist anywhere, than that eyes should be wantonly dug out where they did exist. Of course we cannot say what may or may not be possible in nature ; but it does seem as if, before the heart could get so completely ossified, the head must cease to operate. And the wonder is, not so much that the poet should have introduced such unnatural beings, as that he should have gathered so much of nature about them as to make us forget their unnaturalness. Perhaps they should be regarded rather as among the means than among the ends of the play ; as belonging more to the canvas of the work than to the spectacle painted thereon.

The improbability of their conduct towards the king was perhaps the greatest difficulty involved in the subject, and gave occasion for the subordinate plot and persons of the drama. By thus exhibiting them in other connections the poet was enabled to soften down that improbability, so as to keep it from sticking out into our faces and breaking the illusion. Some critics, indeed, have censured this plot as an impertinence and embarrassment to the main one : forgetting, apparently, that to deepen and prolong any feeling some diversion is necessary ; and that a certain harmony and proportion of objects and emotions is required to give any one of them an appropriate effect. Edmund's independent concurrence with Goneril and Regan in wickedness looks as if Satan were let loose upon the world for a season, and had set the elements of evil astir in many hearts at the same time. "Unnaturalness between the child

and the parent, dissolutions of ancient amities, divisions in state, banishment of friends, and nuptial breaches," seem, sure enough, the order of the day. Thus our feelings are balanced and braced by a co-operation of many objects in one effect. Besides, the agreement of the sister-fiends in filial ingratitude might of itself seem to imply some sisterly attachment between them. To complete, therefore, their frightful deformity of character, they must show, that the same principle which unites them against their father, will upon the turning of occasion divide them against each other. Accordingly, that their sympathy springs only from a concurrence of interest, appears in that a conflict of interests breeds in them the deadliest antipathy. As they are rendered mutually aidant by a common hate, so they are rendered mutually hostile by a common love ; as if on purpose to show, that there is nothing in them but selfishness, nor even a place to put any thing else ; and that "natures which contemn their origin" are utterly incapable of good in any form or towards any object whatever.

Hence the necessity of bringing them forward in circumstances adapted to set them at strife ; of unfolding to them and to us a character bold and bad enough to turn their wicked alliance into an equally wicked enmity,—a character fitted to inspire them with a passion which they will cut their way through each other's life to gratify. The skill with which, even while assisting each other in crime, their aims are suddenly brought a-clash, need not be dwelt upon. In Edmund they find a character worth the fighting for ; and that they should now be as restless and reckless to thwart as they previously were to aid one another, is but the natural carry-

ing out of their character. In no other way, perhaps, could their transition from apparent sympathy to real antipathy be effected without abating their claims to execration. For, even to have hated each other from love of any body but a villain and because of his villany, had seemed a degree of virtue. Thus we are let to see, that whether they are drawn together or drawn asunder, still it is from an appetite for sin ; that if they unite, it is to do evil, and if they divide, it is to do the same. It is a significant fact, that their passion for Edmund grows out of his treachery to his father ; as though they saw in his proceedings an apology for their own ; from his similarity of conduct inferred a congeniality of mind ; and selfishly caught at his audacious criminality as an earnest of protection to themselves. It is worthy of remark, also, that they are both of the self-same mind and metal ; indeed they are so much alike in character, that we can scarce distinguish them as individuals ; seem almost too much like repetitions of each other to be realities. All of which but makes them the fitter for the work they are to do ; for their sameness of treatment renders it the more galling and insupportable, by causing it to seem the result of a set purpose, a conspiracy coolly formed and unrelentingly pursued. That they should lay upon their father the blame of their own ingratitude, and stick their poisoned tongues into him under pretence of doing him good, is a still further refinement of cruelty, not more natural for them than it is painful to him ; while their insensibility to his sufferings and resentment but goes to make his sufferings the deeper and his resentment the sharper. On the whole, it is not easy to conceive how creatures could be made

more apt to flay alive the feelings of a fond old father ; they are framed of just the right stuff to drive mad any one who set his heart on receiving any comfort or kindness from them.

EDMUND.

FOR the union of wit and wickedness, of whatever is admirable in mind with whatever is detestable in heart, Edmund stands next to Richard and Iago. His quick, powerful intellect, his manifest courage, his energy of character, and his noble manly person and presence, prepare us on our first acquaintance with him to expect from him not only great undertakings, but great success in what he undertakes. But, while his personal advantages are such as naturally generate pride, his disgraces of fortune are equally adapted to generate guilt from pride. The circumstances in which he is first brought before us, the matter and manner of Gloster's conversation about him and to him, sufficiently explain his conduct ; while the subsequent outleakings of his mind in the soliloquy let us into the secret springs and motives of his action. With a mixture of guilt, shame, and waggery, his father, before his face, and in the presence of one whose respect he would be most apt to prize, makes him and his birth the subject of gross and licentious discourse ; confesses himself ashamed yet compelled to acknowledge him ; announces the design of keeping him away from home, as if to avoid the shame of his presence ; and makes comparisons between him and "another son some year elder than this, who is yet no dearer in his account," such as could hardly fail

at once to wound his pride, to stimulate his ambition, and awaken his enmity. Thus the kindly influences of human relationship and household ties,—influences so creative as corroborative of virtuous tendencies,—are turned into their contraries. He feels himself the victim of a disgrace for which he is not to blame; which he can never hope to outgrow; which no degree of personal worth can ever efface; and from which he sees no escape but in the pomp and circumstance of worldly power. His consciousness of fine abilities makes him ambitious of a corresponding sphere; his sense of undeserved reproach inspires him with a feeling of injustice; and his ambition easily twists the seeming injustice into a license for seeking by any means the sphere he wants.

Nor is this all: Whatever predisposition he may have towards filial piety is discouraged by his father's open impiety towards his mother; nay, even his duty to her seems to absolve him from all obligation of gratitude to him: the religious awe with which we naturally contemplate the mystery of our coming hither, and the mysterious union of those who brought us hither, is killed or kept out of his mind by his father's looseness and levity respecting his birth and her who bore him. Thus the very beginnings of religion are stifled in him by the impossibility of revering his parents: there is no sanctity, no holiness about the origin and agents of his being, to inspire him with awe: as they have no religion towards each other, so he can have none towards them; and we can hardly be religious at all, unless our religion be first drawn out towards our parents. Indeed, the very principles, that would make Edmund respect an honourable birth, would cause him to scorn such an

one as he has ; he can only despise his parents for being his parents ; and the consciousness, that he is himself a living monument of their shame, tends but to pervert and poison the felicities of his nature.

Moreover, by his residence and education abroad he is cut off from all the household sympathies and influences, the fatherly counsels and kindnesses which might otherwise serve to remunerate and make him forget the disgrace entailed upon him. His shame of birth, however, by no means represses his pride of blood : on the contrary, it furnishes the conditions wherein such pride, though the natural auxiliary of many virtues, is most likely to ripen and fester into crime. For, while his shame begets scorn of family connections, his pride passes into covetousness of family possessions : his passion for hereditary honours is unrestrained by domestic attachments ; no love of Edgar's person comes in to keep down a lust for his distinctions ; and he is led to envy as a rival the brother whom he would else respect as a superior. Thus all the family sentiments which naturally prompt a man to support the dignities of his house, only prompt him to usurp them.

Always thinking, too, of his dishonour, he is always on the alert for signs that others are thinking of it ; and the jealousy thus engendered construes every show of respect into an effort of courtesy ;—a thing which, at once moving and mocking the desire of being respected, but inflames his ambition while chafing his pride. The corroding suspicion,—a passion that always makes the food it lives on,—that others are perhaps secretly scorning while outwardly acknowledging his noble descent, leads him to find or fancy in them a disposition to in-

demnify themselves for his personal superiority out of his social debasement. Upon this one defect in his title he can thus lay the blame of all his failures; and we all know how apt men are to attribute their miscarriages to causes out of themselves. But for this drawback, Edmund knows not what he might have, and so presumes he should have all he wants. With a fault over which he has no control thus standing with its broad back ready to bear the burden of all his disappointments, he is of course relieved from taking the censure of them to himself.

Thus the whole stream of Edmund's action is corrupted at the source. As there is something in the nature of Goneril and Regan that converts all the gifts of fortune into venom; so there is something in Edmund's fortune that envenoms all the gifts of nature. They seem bad in spite of their condition; he, in consequence of it. Even the springs of love within him are made to send forth issues of evil: the very germs of domestic virtue vegetate forth into lust of the family possessions that will put out of sight the stains of his birth. The stings of reproach, being personally unmerited, are felt and resented as wrongs; and with the plea of injustice he can easily reconcile his mind to the most wicked schemes. Aware of Edgar's virtues, that he is

“a noble brother,
Whose nature is so far from doing harms,
That he suspects none; on whose foolish honesty
His practises ride easy;”

he feels, however, no relentings, but shrugs his shoul-

ders, and laughs off all compunctions with an "I must," as if justice to himself were a sufficient excuse for his criminal purposes.

With "the plague of custom" and "the curiosity of nations" Edmund of course has no compact; he did not consent to them, and therefore is not bound by them. He is under no obligations to the world; it has done nothing for him; he owes it no subscription: it is even thwarting what nature has done for him; why, then, may he not thwart what it is doing against him? It has made his excellencies his enemies; and may he not make its follies his friends? Nay, has it not virtually released him from honouring its regulations by refusing to honour his endowments? Custom, convention, authority, what are they to him? he came into the world in spite of them; and may he not thrive in the world by outwitting them? Perhaps he owes his gifts to a violation of them; and may he not use his gifts to circumvent them? "To nature's law his services are bound." Since his dimensions are so well compact, his mind so generous, and his shape so true, he prefers nature as she has made to nature as she has placed him, and freely employs the wit she has given him to compass the wealth she has withheld from him.

Thus, since "the world is not his friend, nor the world's law," our philosopher appeals from convention to nature; and, as usually happens in such cases, takes only so much of nature as will serve his purpose. For convention is itself a part of nature: it is just as natural that men should grow up together into communities, as that they should grow up severally into individuals; and the laws are as much the work of nature in the one

case as in the other. But the same principle which prompts the appeal, of course orders the tribunal,—picks the judge and packs the jury,—to which he appeals: for Satan always fills the mouth with arguments to support the mind's lies; and, when the heart's services are in the market, never fails to open a liberal purse of reasons to the understanding. Nor does nature, in such cases, ever contradict, or debate, or try conclusions with us, but nods assent to all our propositions, and lets us have our own way, knowing, apparently, that “the very devils cannot plague us better;” as she teaches the wilful child to keep his hand out of the fire, by alluring him through his very wilfulness to put his hand into it.—Thus Edmund charges upon society the evils he suffers by the ordering of Providence; arraigns the law for his parents' violation thereof; holds morality responsible for the shame he incurs through their sins against it; pleads his noble gifts to offset his ignoble birth; and from the excellence of his growth argues the lawfulness of his planting.

Nevertheless he does not, like Goneril and Regan, perpetrate or meditate any gratuitous crimes. There is no spontaneous, purposeless wickedness in him; he nowhere sins merely for the sake of sinning, but for certain definite external objects and rewards. In a word, he is not one of those who “will not serve the Lord if the devil bid them;” he does not prefer evil on its own account, even though it make against his interest. Nay, he does not so much commit crimes, as devise accidents and then commit his cause to them; not so much makes war upon morality, as bows and smiles and shifts her out of the way, that his wit may have free course. He

deceives others without scruple indeed, but then he does not consider them bound to trust him ; and tries to avail himself of their credulity or criminality without becoming responsible for it. Flirting and coquetting with fortune, and seeking rather to elude than to invade the laws of morality, he but practises a sort of careless, lighthearted, frolicsome villany, as if it were to give room for his wit that the world was made so wide. He is indeed a pretty bold experimenter ; but that is because he has nothing to lose if he fail, and much to gain if he succeed. Nor does he attempt to disguise from himself, or gloss over, or anywise palliate his designs, but boldly confronts and stares them in the face, as though assured of sufficient external grounds and reasons whereby to justify or excuse them. Nor is he inaccessible to the relentings and compunctions of nature, only his ambitious desires have for the present silenced them ; hence, when the certainty of death has killed off his ambition, his humanity unexpectedly gushes forth, and he “ means to do some good despite of his own nature.”

Edmund's strength and acuteness of intellect, unsubjected as they are to the moral and religious sentiments, of course exempt him from the superstitions that prevail about him. He has an eye to discern the error of such things, but no sense for the greater truth they involve : for such superstitions are but the natural suggestions of our religious instincts unenlightened by Revelation : so that, as hath been said, he who would not be superstitious without Revelation, would probably be irreligious with it : and that there is more of truth in superstition than in irreligion, is implied in the very fact of a relig-

ious instinct. Edmund assures us, that he should have been what he is, "had the maidenliest star in the firmament twinkled on his nativity:" but in thus discarding what is false he accepts more of untruth than he discards; and shows by his contempt of prevailing errors, that he is himself below them. It is merely the atheism of his heart that makes him so discerning of error in what he does not like; in which case the subtleties of the understanding but lead to the rankest unwisdom. There is probably nothing in the world that men had not better worship than themselves: reverence to stocks and stones even is better than irreverence to God; and there is doubtless more of wisdom in what are called the absurdities of faith than in the reasoning, self-sufficing intellectuality that affects to scorn them.

LECTURE XIV.

TRAGEDY OF LEAR CONTINUED.

LEAR—CORDELIA—KENT AND EDGAR—THE STEWARD—THE FOOL.

“IN Lear old age itself is made a character,”—a character at first disfigured with peccant humours, and afterwards made beautiful by suffering. With his body tottering beneath the weight of years and cares of state, his mind is sliding into that second childhood which is content to play with the shadows of things that have been, as the first is to play with the shadows of things that are to be. So that the same infirmity which counsels him to resign the burdens, also counsels him to reserve the baubles of sovereignty; and while appearing as weak as a child he at the same time appears as loving and unsuspecting. Yet underneath the tattered covering of senility there sleeps the soul of youth, his noble faculties having but wrapped themselves in the chrysalis, to await a higher birth. As time has thinned away the props of his affections and impaired his physical energies, his feelings have centered themselves more and more upon his daughters; his life has come to be but an offshoot from them; and he has thought “to set his rest on their kind care and nursery.” Paternal love and faith in filial piety, the sentiments that strike deepest and live longest in the human bosom, have grown into entire possession of him. Equally strong in

this love and this faith, he of course does not distinguish between the obedience which springs from love of his person, and that which springs from lust of his power; he is too confiding and therefore too confident to discern the gushings of a filial from the pumpings of a selfish heart; and he cannot suspect his daughters of hollowness in professions which he is so conscious of deserving and so fond of receiving, and in which he knows it is alike the ornament and the sacrament of our nature to be sincere.

In a state of dependence on his children Lear naturally expects a closer sympathy from them; thinks to enrich and strengthen himself in their gratitude by enriching and strengthening them with his bounty. For, what elevates often isolates; and solitude of spirit is paying too much for superiority of place: and our sympathies stoop to those below us much easier than they rise to those above us; and those who trustingly lean upon us at once encourage and strengthen us to support them. Besides, the fruits that gladden grow, for most part, on the plains of life; the heights are magnificent indeed, but often desolate; stick us up there by ourselves, and our hearts are pretty apt to starve or freeze to death; while those who stand above and around us help at least to keep the cold off us. But, as our humanity is most apt to congeal or petrify when thus exalted apart for homage, so it approves itself richest and strongest when it survives and voluntarily resigns that exaltation. And herein consists the beauty of Lear's character, that his feelings do but gather depth and strength from the impotence and oblivion of age, until nature comes to outwrestle the attractions of power

and the habits of sovereignty ; thus ending in a triumph of the man over the monarch.

Prizing his kingdom chiefly as a dowry for his children, Lear presumes they will prize it chiefly as a gift from him, and will even use the prerogatives derived from the king as means and occasions of piety and tenderness to the father. Nay, more ; he regards those prerogatives as an encumbrance, for that they obstruct the free grace of filial affection, and longs for that awful helplessness which, knowing no appeal save to the generous feelings, is pretty sure to have those feelings for its advocate and intercessor. Knowing, in short, that love is naturally patient and assiduous in proportion to the weakness of its object ; and that where virtue or religion exists nothing is so sacred and awful as defencelessness ; —knowing this, he of course expects that his children will be the more his children for ceasing to be his subjects ; and that they will be all the kinder to him for his inability to resist or resent their unkindness. Nothing can be more touchingly beautiful, than the spectacle of the aged king thus doing away the constraints of authority to admit more unequivocal demonstrations of love, and resigning his power over his children to rest on his power with them.

The first words in the play inform us, that the division of the kingdom has been resolved upon, the terms of the division arranged, and the several portions allotted, before the beginning of the action. “I thought,” says Kent, “the king had more affected the Duke of Albany than Cornwall:” and Gloster replies, “It did always seem so to us : but now, in the division of the kingdom, it appears not which of the dukes he values most ; for

equalities are so weighed, that curiosity in neither can make choice in either's moiety." The trial of professions, therefore, is obviously but a trick of the king's, to surprise his children into expressions which filial modesty and reverence would else forbid. Though the dowries have all been settled beforehand, he would have them seem the rewards and be contended for as the prizes of filial virtue; and in the eagerness of anticipation he forgets that such sentiments as he is appealing to ought to be, and naturally wish to be their own reward; and therefore are rather silenced than drawn out by any attempt to bribe or buy an expression of them. Not that Lear distrusts his children, but that he has a morbid hungering and thirsting after the outward tokens of affection; is not content to know the heart beats for him, but craves to feel and count over its beatings. Assuming, therefore, and confiding in their plenitude of love, he seeks but to provoke an utterance of it; and he casts about and taxes his invention to spring an excitement upon their feelings, and thus overcome the delicacy that keeps them in reserve. In a word, it is merely the heart's play of a doting father, whose feelings have gotten the better of his judgment, to surprise and betray his children into a rivalry of devotion; one of those childish devices to which a fond affection so naturally resorts, to scare up some fresh, unpremeditated response in the lips of its object. Being, moreover, about to become the nursling of his children, to make his daughters his mother, he very naturally wishes to bind their hearts while subscribing his power; to arm himself with their pledges while investing them with his prerogatives.

Measuring their feelings by his own, he of course anticipates the strongest professions where he feels the deepest attachment. And the same doting fondness which suggested so whimsical a device, makes him angry at its defeat. And the success of his trick with the first two, heightens his irritation at its failure with the third. As his greedy ears "devour up their discourse," his appetite is sharpened for more; his *lust of being loved* grows by what it feeds on. Knowing the aptness of a reverential affection to shun all gratuitous utterance, he has aimed to furnish an occasion sufficient to justify the fullest disclosure. Defeated in his plan, and that too where he is at once the surest and the most desirous of success, he naturally enough flies off in a transport of rage. Cordelia's silence to his request he immediately construes into disobedience to his authority; a thing, of course, "which nor his person nor his place can bear." Still it is not so much a doubt of her love as a dotage of his trick that frets and chafes him: the device is a *pet* with him; and its failure calls in question his skill as well as baulks his desire. Besides, he has looked forward to the trial with somewhat of the uneasy and impatient anxiety with which a child looks forward to a favourite holiday. To the King of France and the Duke of Burgundy, who are rivalling for Cordelia's hand, he has made her the chief argument of his praise, setting her forth as the solace of his age, the best hope of his now joyless and declining years; and he has calculated on the trial as the time when all his pride of parentage should be justified, when his hungry heart should eat and be satisfied. In Cordelia's answer, therefore, he experiences all the chagrin, and mortification, and dis-

appointment of a child at being suddenly denied the pleasure he had most fondly and confidently anticipated.

And there is, withal, an appearance of obstinacy and sullenness in Cordelia's answer, as if, because her sisters had said much and meant nothing, she would therefore mean much and say nothing, and so resent the old man's credulity to their lies by refusing to tell him the truth. But the fact is, Cordelia cannot, if she wills, talk much about what she is, and what she intends. For there is a virgin delicacy and modesty in all deep and true affection, which makes it shrink from exposure and shun observation. To speak itself out, looks too much like betraying the heart's confidence: its true utterance, is its manifest fear to be uttered; the more it is ashamed to be seen, the more it *blushes* itself into sight. Seeking, moreover, our happiness, not our applause, such affection naturally tries to hide behind its own deeds, and make us forget the giver in the enjoyment of the gift. Such is the beautiful instinct of true feeling, to embody itself sweetly and silently in deeds, lest from showing itself in words it should come to be proud or vain of itself.

It is not strange, therefore, that Cordelia, hearing hollowness talk so loud, should conclude to "love and be silent." And it is as little strange, perhaps, that Lear, impetuous by nature, irritable through age, and self-willed from irresponsibility, on the tiptoe of expectation, and in the full tide of successful experiment, should be surprised by her answer into a tempest of passion. His anger at the failure is naturally proportioned to his

confidence of success ; and in the disorder of his thoughts he at once loses sight of

“ Her little, nameless, unremembered, acts
Of kindness and of love,”

which have insensibly wrought in him to love her most, and to expect the most love from her. In all of which the old king, enamoured of his trick and vexed at its defeat, but acts like a peevish fretful child, at either end of life, who, treating every untoward event as the result of volition, hacks his knife to punish its dullness, or breaks the stick that will not stand at his bidding ; who resolves to have nothing unless he may have all that he would ; who, if prevented from kissing, falls to striking his nurse ; and who assumes, though he knows better all the while, that nothing is meant but what is said, and that nothing is said, unless more be said than can possibly be true.

As Lear’s “intense desire of being intensely loved” begets the eager wish for his daughters’ extravagant professions ; so his inveterate habits of sovereignty immediately convert the wish into a claim, and he proceeds forthwith to enforce the love which he had thought to inspire. Incapable of any medium between the extremes of fondness and fierceness, his mind, thus jerked out of its course, runs into an eddy of contradictions : no sooner has he laid aside his power than, baffled in his design, he snatches it up again to effect the very purpose for which he laid it aside. So that as fast as he resigns his authority he is crossed by habits that will not let it stay resigned ; and he resumes it to extort the professions which he resigns it to purchase. Mean-

while his craving for sympathy, by passing into a command, necessarily defeats itself. For sympathy, from its nature, always takes us by surprise, and is never good for any thing when we will its coming or know when it comes: stealing into us and stealing out of us in default or in spite of volition, we never dream of its approach until it has got possession of us, nor think of its presence until it has gone; and, when called upon to explain the why, the how, or the whence, of its coming, we can only answer, it is because it is you, it is because it is I. Hence the well-known hardness and insensibility of those who spend much of their time in trying to force their sympathies, endeavouring to "laugh by precept and shed tears by rule." For our sympathies, being of inspiration not of will, must come up of their own accord; and the undertaking to get them up, whether for luxury or for effect, is the surest way to kill them; in a word, our forcing-pumps only tend to dry up the very sources of them. And for the same reason our sympathies necessarily cease, and become mere affectation, whenever we go to contemplating and admiring them; for the moment the eye is turned inwards to look at them, it of course loses sight of the object which inspires them, and in which alone they can live and be. Thus does nature cunningly guard against conceit of sympathy, by so ordering things that when we have it most we are least aware of having it at all; as the eyes sees not nor thinks of itself while enjoying a beautiful prospect. Enough of digression.

Men sometimes take a secret gratification in the mere exercise of the will without or against reason, as though they could make a thing right or true which they did

not find so ; in which cases their resolution is not unlike Sir Thomas Browne's faith, who took pleasure in believing things *because* they were impossible. Moreover, men sometimes move the faster for the very reason that they ought not to move at all ; their very shame of doing wrong hurries and precipitates them where it will be a still greater shame to retreat ; as if they were walking barefoot over red-hot embers where the very pains and perils of the passage add speed and elasticity to the tread. Besides, to help themselves over one crime, men sometimes put themselves in a dilemma of crime ; create a necessity of choosing between two evils, that they may thereby divide and conquer an opposing or reproaching conscience ; having done a certain wrong, they fortify themselves therein with an oath, that they may have the obligation of an oath to plead against a revocation of the act.

Such appears to be the case with Lear in his treatment of Cordelia. In the first place, he *will* do the thing because he knows it to be wrong : in the second place, feeling the injustice of his rash beginning, his very misgivings and relentings sting him onward in what he has begun : and in the third place, because the deed is wrong he therefore binds it with an oath, that it may be as bad to recall it as it is to have done it ; that is, because he ought not to have driven the nail, therefore he *clinches* it. Kent's entreaties and remonstrances only serve to fix Lear where his frenzied wilfulness has hurried him : through pride of independence and of irresponsibility he becomes the more headstrong or will-strong from opposition, and his obstinacy, to make itself good, even visits upon the opposer the very evils which he is striving to

arrest ; for men are never so impatient of advice or remonstrance against their proceedings, as when their hearts are set to do wrong. Having done the thing, Lear of course pleads the reason of his oath against the unreason of his act, and tries to shelter himself from compunctious visitings beneath the obligation of his vow.

So much for Cordelia's silence and for Lear's treatment of her in consequence thereof. I have dwelt so long upon it, because it has always seemed to me the most improbable thing in the play,

“ That she, who even but now was his best object,
The argument of his praise, balm of his age,
His best, his dearest, should in this trice of time
Dismantle so many folds of favour.”

It is obvious in what follows, that he cannot silence or suppress the conviction that he has done her injustice. His disposition to construe the ingratitude of the others as a judgment upon him for his treatment of her ; his thinking aloud, “ I did her wrong,” when meditating on the unkindness of those for whom he has robbed and disowned her ; the shrinking soreness of mind apparent in his reply to the Knight's statement respecting the Fool's grief at her banishment ; his obstinate, excessive confidence in the others, endeavouring to find or make excuses for their seeming abatement of kindness ;—these things show, that in “ giving her father's heart from her” he has driven peace from himself ; and that conscience has all the while been urging him to a retraction which pride and his oath would not permit.

But the great thing in the delineation of Lear, is the progress and effect of his passion in re-developing his

faculties. For the character seems designed in part to illustrate the power of passion to reawaken and raise the faculties from the tomb wherein age hath quietly inurned them. In the representation we have accordingly, as it were, a handful of tumult embosomed in a sea, gradually overspreading, and pervading, and fearfully convulsing the entire mass of waters. Lear's very infirmities of body serve but to unfold, enlarge, and impress his splendours and energies of mind; his resurgent powers coming forth with a strength, a vigour, and intensity unknown, perhaps impossible before, like the resurrection to a higher, a larger, and more glorious life.

Coming before us at first full of paternal love and faith in filial piety, his noble mind, freed from the cares of state and settled into repose, seems about to run through the vale of age so deep, and smooth, and still, as to leave us unadmonished of its flowing. The possibility of filial desertion seems never to have entered his thoughts: for so absolute is his trust, that he can hardly admit the evidence of sight against his cherished anticipations; and even when there is a manifest falling off in their "ceremonious affection," though he "perceives a most faint neglect," he "rather blames it as his own jealous curiosity, than as a very pretence and purpose of unkindness." Bereft, as he thinks, of Cordelia, he cleaves the closer to those that are left, assuring himself and seeking recompense in the assurance, that they will spare no pains to make up the loss. Cast off and struck over the heart by another, he flies with still greater confidence to the third; as men often build hopes of prosperity on experience of the reverse, and, from the very thickening of darkness around them, infer the nearer

approach of day. Now that only one of three remains to him, he will not, cannot doubt that she will be thrice his daughter; and that, as his injuries augment his claims to her kindness, so his sufferings will challenge her pity. Though proofs of her flying off are multiplied upon him, still he cannot give her up, cannot be provoked to curse her; he *will* not see, will not own to himself the fact of her revolt.

“No, Regan, thou shalt never have my curse;
Thy tender-hefted nature shall not give
Thee o’er to harshness; her eyes are fierce, but thine
Do comfort, and not burn: ’tis not in thee
To grudge my pleasures, to cut off my train,
To bandy hasty words, to scant my sizes,
And, in conclusion, to oppose the bolt
Against my coming in: thou better knowest
The offices of nature, bond of childhood,
Effects of courtesý, dues of gratitude;
The half o’ the kingdom thou hast not forgot,
Wherein I thee endowed.”

Such is the tenacity with which this worn-out old man clings to his last stay, his only surviving hope of filial sympathy.

When, however, the truth is forced home upon him, and he can no longer evade or shuffle off the conclusion, the effect is perfectly awful. So long as his heart had something to lay hold of, and cling to, and repose upon, his mind was the abode of order and peace: but now that his feelings are rendered objectless, torn from their accustomed strong-holds, and thrown back upon themselves, there springs up a wild chaos of the brain, a whirling tumult and anarchy of the thoughts, which,

until imagination has time to work, chokes down his utterance. The crushing of his aged spirit brings to light its embosomed treasures : the swellings of grief and rage break off the crust which age and custom have gathered about his humanity, and disclose the hidden depths and buried riches of his mind. Thus his terrible energy of thought and speech, as soon as imagination gets wrought into the strife, springs naturally from the revulsion of his feelings ; a revulsion which seems to wrench his whole being into dislocation, convulsing and upturning his soul from the bottom. For nothing will generate in a man such a tug and war of the faculties as the want or loss of support for the affections. It is an instinctive struggling of the spirit over an abyss,—a spasmodic overstraining of the soul, to put forth wings, as it were, with which to sustain itself in an element too unsubstantial to keep it from falling.

In this transition of Lear's mind from its first stillness and repose to its subsequent tempest and storm ; in the hurried evolutions, and revulsions, and alternations of feeling,—the inexpugnable faith in filial virtue, the keen sensibility to filial ingratitude, the mighty hunger of the heart, thrice repelled, yet evermore strengthened by repulse ; and in the turning up of sentiments and faculties deeply imbedded beneath the incrustations of time and place ;—in all this we have a retrospect of the aged sufferer's whole life ; the abridged history of a mind enriched with "the breath and finer spirit" of manifold experiences ; a mind passing through many successive stages, each putting off the form, yet retaining and perfecting the grace of the one that preceded it,—the feelings and virtues of one period dying down to reappear

with additional beauty in the next ;—the history, in short, of a mind growing up through the various relations and attachments of life, extracting and concentrating the essence of them all into one affection.

All things considered, the difficulties of the subject as well as the grandeur of the results, it can hardly be questioned, that Lear is Shakspeare's masterpiece of individual characterization. Less complex and varied, perhaps, than Hamlet, the character is, however, much more remote from the common feelings and experiences of human life. Few of us arrive at the age, fewer of us have the capacity, and fewer still are ever in a condition, to feel what Lear feels, do what he does, and suffer what he suffers. Had Shakspeare been the author of the human heart, it seems hardly possible that he should have better known what we should naturally conceive to be both its internal workings and its outward expressions, with the qualities and in the circumstances supposed. Most truly may be said of him what he himself hath said of an ideal person :

“For on the tip of his subduing tongue
All kind of arguments and question deep,
All replication prompt, and reason strong,
For his advantage still did wake and sleep :
To make the weeper laugh, the laugher weep,
He had the dialect and different skill,
Catching all passions in his craft at will.”

In picking up such a withered husk of manhood, with his faculties all folded in and nestled down to rest, and conducting him, naturally and consequentially, to the full, and even more than full re-exfoliation of his powers :

—in marshalling the causes and marking the stages of this resurgence, from the first faint stirrings in the scene with Cordelia to the overwhelming eruptions amid the storm, where the swellings and heavings of his spirit erect and dilate his wilted, shrunken form; and the splendours of his soul appear bursting through the cracks and breaches which time has wrought in his case of flesh :—in ordering the fierce conflux and collision of passions,—intense love for his daughters, remorse for the wrong he has done, grief, rage, and revenge, for the wrong he has suffered, apprehension of coming madness, and pity for the “houseless sufferers” around him;—these passions all now edying into ominous silence round the thought of Cordelia, now entempesting his soul to desperation, and driving him out to seek shelter from his own reflections in “the peltings of the pitiless storm :”—in marking the various degrees of insanity, tracing the scarce distinguishable gradations from incipient wildness to utter confusion of brain, so that we can almost feel the snapping asunder, one after another, of the cords that bind his faculties in due subordination :—in adjusting the symptoms that “the great rage is cured in him,”—those glimmerings and flickerings of returning reason,—“You do me wrong to take me out o’ the grave,”—“Be your tears wet?”—and “’Would I were assured of my condition ;”—as if his spirit were hovering and trembling on the border which divides, or rather, unites the two worlds, and, oppressed with the confusion of shadows and realities, were hesitating to which world it belonged, and trying to feel its way back into life :—in the union of mental power with bodily weakness, of strength to feel with impotence to

redress his wrongs,—the two working in a sort of inverse proportion, so that each at the same time augments and offsets the other; and he is, at least he seems the weaker in body for his strength of mind, and the stronger in mind for his weakness of body; the powerless arm stimulating the intellectual energies, and reinforcing itself out of them:—in the fierce intensity of imagination made lurid by passion,—a power which, seizing as by instinctive sympathy, and devouring, and assimilating the direfullest enmities of nature, reproduces them in words which eat and burn their way into the heart; as when he says,

“The untented woundings of a father’s curse
Pierce every sense about thee;”—

or this,

“All the stored vengeance of heaven fall
On her ungrateful top! Strike her young bones,
Ye taking airs, with lameness!—
You nimble lightnings, dart your blinding flames
Into her scornful eyes! Infect her beauty,
You fen-sucked fogs, drawn by the powerful sun,
To fall and blast her pride;”—

words which seem to create and constitute rather than represent the deeds they describe,—not so much to stand for things as to *be* the things themselves which they signify:—and finally, in moulding the elements of character into this most original, yet most truthful combination,—innate goodness of heart interwoven with the obliquities of place,—the moral wisdom of a right noble nature jostled and elbowed on all sides by the vices of royalty, yet scoured rather than disfigured by the con-

tact;—a combination where we have selfishness and generosity wrestling each other into greater strength; each alternately the victor and the vanquished of the other, yet evermore struggling for that impossible reconciliation with its antagonist, wherein both of them may be gratified at once:—In all this the poet has shown a depth and subtilty in the logic of passion such as have never been equalled but by himself, nor even by himself, unless, perhaps, in the single instance of Othello.

CORDELIA.

“OF Cordelia’s heavenly beauty of soul,” says Schlegel, “I do not dare to speak.” This is worth all the other criticisms I have seen upon her, put together. ’Would my plan permitted me to leave her where he has left her; for the best I can say of her will seem, I fear, but desecration of an holy thing. Such a being can be understood only by the feelings of love and respect; and I need not say how incompatible such feelings are with a critical spirit. Happily, however, we live in an age too scientific to hold any thing sacred from criticism, and which might think it superstition, should any one refuse

“To peep and botanize
Upon his mother’s grave.”

That Cordelia, though so seldom seen or heard, is felt throughout the play, has been often remarked, and can hardly have failed to impress every observing reader. I had read the play occasionally for several years before

I could fully realize but she was among the principal speakers ; and even now, upon taking up the play, I can scarce persuade myself but that the two hours of reading is to be spent chiefly with her ; and I always close the book with a feeling of disappointment at having seen and heard her so little ; and sometimes even turn back to see if I have not overlooked some passages where she is introduced.

This power of acting where she is not ; this gift of presence without appearance, or, if I may so speak, of real without visible presence, Cordelia has in a much greater degree than Ophelia, though in a far more subtle and intangible kind. The effect is like some strains of melody with which my ear has often been haunted ; whose "piercing sweetness" had so bewitched and enchanted the hearing, that it caught and turned every stray sound into an image thereof ; so that

"The music in my *ear* I bore
Long after it was heard no more."

Mrs. Jameson, speaking of Cordelia, says, "every thing in her lies beyond our view, and affects us in such a manner that we rather feel than perceive it." It is in this remoteness, I take it, that the secret of her fascination mainly consists. Her character has no foreground at all ; nothing outstanding or obvious, which touches us in a definable way : she is all perspective ; self-withdrawn ; so that she comes to us by inspiration rather than by vision. Even when she is before us we rather feel than see her presence ; so much more is suggested than is expressed, so much "more is meant than meets

the eye," that what we see is at once forgotten in the intensity of thought and feeling which it moves. She thus affects us through finer and deeper susceptibilities than consciousness can grasp; as if she at once used and empowered us to use a higher medium of communication than sense; as if her presence acted, in some mysterious, supernatural way, upon our very life, which, even because it is our life, takes the deepest impression without being in the least aware of it. And perhaps we think of her the more, for the very reason that we cannot understand why we think of her at all; as the mysteriousness of a thing sometimes has the effect of enchantment upon us; and it ceases to interest us as soon as we think we have mastered it.

So that the same thing mentioned above respecting her affection is true of her character generally. She has the same deep, quiet, fascinating reserve and remoteness of thought as of feeling, so that her mind becomes conspicuous from its retiringness, and wins the attention by shrinking from it. Though she nowhere says any thing indicative of much intelligence, she always strikes us somehow as very intelligent, and even as the more intelligent for that her intelligence does not appear, as though she knew too much to show her knowledge. And, indeed, her intelligence is so bound up with her affections, that she cannot draw it off into expression by itself; it is held in perfect solution, as it were, with all the other elements of her nature, and nowhere falls down into a sediment so as to be producible in a separate state. She has a deeper and truer knowledge of her sisters than anybody else about them: but she knows them by heart rather than by head; she seizes

their disposition by an instinct of its antipathy to her own ; so that she can *feel* and *act*, but cannot *articulate*, a prophecy of their future course. The truth is, she cannot talk her thoughts to the ear, without talking them equally and at the same time to the eye, because her tongue is no more the organ of her mind, than any other member, or all the other members of her person. “What she well intends, she’ll do’t, before she’ll speak,” because the working of her mind immediately sets all her other powers at work ; and therefore, omitting words, she must needs proceed at once to acts, these being the only form wherein *all* her powers *can* work together. Ask her, in short, what she thinks on any subject, and her answer will be, that she thinks,—nay, she cannot *tell*, she can only *show* you what she thinks : for she has a manifold meaning which cannot be drawn out into words, any more than we can draw water in a sieve ;—a process which of course lets by all the water and retains only the dirt suspended in it. Her intelligence, therefore, involuntarily shapes itself into life, not into speech ; finds its expression in some nameless benignity and grace of demeanour wherein her entire being speaks at once : and she employs her native tongue, the only one at her command, when, bending over her “child-changed father,” she invokes restoration to “hang its medicine upon her lips,” or, kneeling beside him, entreats him to “hold his hands in benediction over her.”

In all which we may recognize a peculiar fitness between Cordelia and the part she was designed more particularly to act ; which was, to exemplify the workings of filial piety, as Lear exemplifies the workings of paternal love. To embody and illustrate this sentiment,

the whole character, in all its movements and aspects, must needs be essentially religious. For filial piety is religion acting under the noblest and sacreddest relation of human existence. And religion, we know or ought to know, is a life, and not a language; and life is the united, harmonious, simultaneous action and expression of our whole being. For our fallen nature is at strife with its Author, and therefore at strife with itself: we are insurgent beings torn with insurgent passions and powers, the whole against its Head, and therefore every part against the whole; and religion, as the name itself imports, is the binding back of the soul to that unity with its Source, from which it has revolted, and so to that unity with itself, that harmony and integrity, which it has lost, and in which alone is its life. The truth of which is exemplified in Cordelia; who, be it observed, never thinks of her piety at all, because her piety only prompts her to think of her father; and whose every thought and emotion, even because it is religious, spontaneously and unavoidably issues in deeds, which are the pulse of moral life. In short, her entire frame is so compactly joined together, all the elements of her nature so perfectly intertwine and intercirculate, that the whole has to move at once; and she can reveal her good thoughts only by veiling them in good works, as the spirit is veiled and revealed in the body; nay, *has* to be so veiled in order to be revealed; for if the veil be torn off, the spirit of course is no longer there.

Hence it is, that Cordelia affects us so deeply and constantly without our being able to perceive how or why. Hence, also, the impression of reserve that runs through her character; for where the whole moves equally and

at once, the parts are not distinctly seen, and therefore seem kept in reserve. And she affects those about her in the same unconscious manner as she affects us ; that is, she keeps their thoughts and feelings busy, by keeping what she thinks and feels hidden beneath what she does : an influence goes forth from her by stealth, and stealthily creeps into them ; an influence which does not appear, and yet is irresistible, and is therefore irresistible, even *because* it does not appear ; and which becomes an undercurrent in their minds, circulates in their blood, as it were, and enriches their life with a beauty which seems their own, and yet is not their own : so that she steals upon us through them, and we think of her the more because they, without suspecting it, remind us of her ; and her light seems brighter because it triumphs over concealment, and makes its very obstructions luminous ; as the moon, when muffling her face in a cloud, often turns the cloud itself into moon, and thus gets the more revealed for the very obscurations in which she seems trying to hide. No one can see Cordelia and be the same that he was before, though utterly unconscious the while of any communication from her. It is as if, without knowing it, or apprizing them of it, she wrote her name in the foreheads of whoever approached her, where all may read it but themselves ; or deposited about their persons some secret, mysterious aroma which, when they are remote from her and thoughtless of her, keeps giving out its perfume, and testifying, though they know it not, that they have been with her.

Accordingly her father loves her most, yet knows not why ; has no assignable reasons for his feeling, and

therefore cannot reason it down ; casts her off from his bounty, but cannot cast her out of his heart ; is restless in her absence, as if there were some secret power about her which he cannot spare, yet did not dream of its existence so long as she was with him. And “since her going into France the Fool has much pined away,” as if the consciousness of her being near, though perhaps not in sight, were necessary to his health ; so that he sickens upon the loss of her, and his life seems travelling away, or travelling home to her ; and yet he suspects not wherefore, and knows but that she was by and his spirits were nimble, she is gone and his spirits are drooping. And the gentleman who carries her Kent’s message, after watching her movements while reading the account of her father’s condition, though she utters nothing in his hearing but sighs, and “shakes the holy water from her eyes,” then “starts away to deal with grief alone,”—returns mad with eloquence and poetry, as if heaven had been opened upon him through her, and he

“Had gazed and gazed, but little thought
What wealth to him the show had brought.”

Thus she imparts and infuses the sweet, divine grace of her nature so cunningly, and silently, and *sacramentally*, that the recipients thereof feel not their obligations to her, or rather to heaven for her, while she is with them, and know not what her presence is doing for them until she is gone, and it may be truly said, her absence alone can reveal her to them.

Such is the influence of a right-minded and right-

mannered woman on those about her: she does not know it, they do not know it; her influence is all the better and stronger that neither of them knows it; she begins to lose it as soon as she goes about to use it and make them sensible of it: it works out of her and in them most, when she perceives and they perceive it least: with noiseless step it glides into them unnoticed and unsuspected, but disturbs and repels them the moment it comes to make itself heard. For her power lies not in what she values herself upon, and voluntarily brings forward, and makes use of, but in something far deeper and diviner than all this, which she knows not of and cannot help;—a subtle effluence which she cannot shut in; which she but *expresses* the more, the more she tries to *repress* it: lest her light should shine too far, she snuffs it and makes it shine farther. Innocent creature! how different from those who, to make their light shine, or rather, to make it *seen*, get up a huge bellows and blow it out! In short, such a woman influences those about her, not so much by virtue of what she thinks and says, as by virtue of what she *is*: without giving or having any reasons for it, she teaches them, before they know or she knows it, to love and respect herself, and in herself to love and respect her sex; and in this one lesson thus taught and thus learned, they get more of true wisdom, deeper and purer instruction than all the books and schools and professors in the world can give.

Which may serve to show the exceeding folly as well as conceit of those (and they are rather plenty now-a-days) who spend so much time in trying to make their influence tell; and whose consciences are always prick-

ing them, unless they are doing some noisy and notorious good. Assuredly, if we would perfume the world or any part of it, we had best stick close to our gardens and cultivate our flowers, never doubting that the winds of heaven will be ever at hand, to waft abroad all the fragrance we can produce : whereas if, trusting too much in ourselves and too little in Providence, we leave the producing to look after the diffusing of our fragrance ; in the first place we shall not diffuse it nearly so well as those swift-footed couriers, and in the second place we shall run the risk of having much less to be diffused.

To return : I know of nothing with which to compare Cordelia ; nothing to illustrate her character by. An impersonation of the holiness of womanhood, herself alone is her own parallel ; and all the objects that lend or borrow beauty, when used as illustrations on other topics, seem dumb or ineloquent of meaning beside her. And yet, “formed,” as she is, “for all sympathies, moved by all tenderness, prompt for all duty, prepared for all suffering ;” and though

“ a spirit still, and bright
With something of an angel light ;”

she seems

“ A creature not too bright or good
For human nature’s daily food.”

We can almost hear her sighs, and see her tears, and feel her breath, as she hangs like a ministering spirit over her reviving father : her character with all its heavenly beauty sinks sweetly and silently into our hearts, enshrining itself among our purest sympathies, known

at once, but never to be forgotten ; and the vision, in its reality to our feelings, abides with us more as a remembrance than an imagination, instructing and inspiring us that of a friend whom we had known and loved in our youth. Superior, perhaps, to all the rest of Shakspeare's women in beauty of character, she is inferior to none of them as a living and breathing reality ; nor should I, taking even her as a specimen, accuse the poet of making any better women than nature makes. Such beings are, among their sex, what diamonds are among jewels ; the best indeed, but no less real than the poorest ; and diamonds, as well as Cordelias, require the artist's hand to make their virtues appear ; did we meet them, we probably should not know them unless some Shakspeare were by to lend us his eyes.

We see Cordelia only in the relation of daughter, and scarcely *see* her even there ; yet we know what she is or would be throughout the whole circle of human relations, just as well as if we had seen her in them all. She is just such a creature, like some we may have known, as it makes one feel safer and happier to live in the same town with ; to walk the same streets that she walks in ; to kneel in the same church where she hath knelt : such an one, the knowledge of whose being in the same house with us renders our room more comfortable, our outlook more beautiful ; puts peace into our pillow, and a soft religious life and joy into our thoughts ; makes the night calmer, the day cheerfuler, the air sweeter and softer and balmier about us : at thought of whom the objects that were looking black upon us brighten up into smiles ; the consciousness of whose presence brings consecration of the place and

sanctification of the feelings ; and the knowing of whom regenerates and purifies the heart, because she can be truly known only in proportion as the heart is pure. And finally, Cordelia, so rich in mild, sweet, gentle austerities, belongs to that class of beings, of whom there are probably more to be found than there are to find them, who seem born to give happiness or something better than happiness to others, and yet to know little of it themselves : unless, peradventure, they have the unseen and unprized gift of sharing the happiness they create ; so that while they seem no less pitiable, they really *are* no less enviable, than admirable.

And the woe of it is, that Cordelia's holiness should have turned traitor to her ; that her perfect truth, the thing we most love her for, should have proved her greatest enemy ; and that she and her father should have been torn asunder to their mutual sorrow by the very thing that ought to have bound them together. But so it has ever been, and perhaps ever will be, in this world of ours, that loud pretence must snatch away the prize while silent worth is toiling to deserve it : yet both gain their ends ; for the one looks to the reward, the other to the desert ; and thus does virtue always triumph ; for she always

“ Plays in the many games of life that one,
Where what she most doth value must be won.”

But truly, in the present atheism of human virtue I fear it may seem unwise to speak thus of tragic heroines, as though the study of them had any thing to do with a knowledge of what is about us. And perhaps it were vain to expect that people generally should take a seri-

ous interest in characters which do not come in a shape to tickle their senses or stir their passions. Even the best of us are used to speak of the vast inferiority of all real to certain imaginary beings, not choosing, perhaps, to remember, that the reason why we find no such characters in real life, may be because we have nothing to find them with; for swine of course never know whether they be pearls or pebbles that lie before them. We, indeed, in our pride of wisdom, sneer at old chivalry for bending the knee to womanhood; forgetting, apparently, that men cease to be as gods, when they get to thinking, we will be as gods.

It is an interesting feature in this representation, that Lear's faith in filial piety is justified by the event, though not his judgment as to the persons in whom it was to be found. Wiser in heart than in understanding, he mistook the object, but was right in the feeling. Thinking, in his pride of sovereignty, to command the gratitude of his children by his bounty to them, and to be himself the author of the love on which he is to depend, he is at last compelled to rest in a love which thrives in spite of himself, a gratitude which no injustice of his could extinguish. Thus the confirmation of his faith grows by the ruin and decay of his pride, and he becomes indebted to the unbought grace of nature for that comfort which he would fain owe entirely to himself. Such is the frequent lesson of human life; for if the fall has greatly marred the beauty of human character, it has equally marred our perception of what remains: and perhaps the greatest punishment of our own vices, is, that they take from us the power to discern the virtue of others. Hoping well but seeing ill, we often go

blundering along, with too little judgment to perceive our want thereof, mistaking persons and things because mistaken as to ourselves, and missing the good we seek, because we lack the goodness to discern it; and perhaps by much experience, many trials, great sufferings, we are finally disciplined into humility and happiness, and brought to know and feel and confess at once the weakness of our reason and the wisdom of faith.

KENT AND EDGAR.

IF the best happiness of life consist in forgetting of self and living for others, Kent and Edgar are those of Shakspeare's men whom one should most wish to resemble. Strikingly similar in virtues and in situation, these two persons are, however, widely different in character. Brothers in magnanimity and in misfortune; equally invincible in fidelity, the one to his king, the other to his father; both driven to disguise themselves, and in their disguise both serving where they stand condemned;—Kent, too generous to control himself, is always quick, fiery and impetuous; Edgar, controlling himself even because of his generosity, is always calm, collected and deliberate. Yet it is difficult which of them to prefer. For if Edgar be the more judicious and prudent, Kent is the more unselfish, of the two; the former disguising himself for his own safety, and then turning his disguise into an opportunity of service; the latter disguising himself merely *in order* to serve, and periling his life in the self-same act whereby the other seeks to preserve it. Nor is Edgar so lost to himself, and so

absorbed in others, but that he can and does survive them ; whereas Kent's life is so bound up in love and loyalty, he lives so entirely for others, that he cannot outlive them, and their death must inevitably "pluck him after." Nevertheless, I know not whether it were better to be the subject or the author of Edgar's tale :—

"Whilst I was big in clamour, came there a man,
Who, having seen me in my worst estate,
Shunned my abhorred society ; but then, finding
Who 'twas that so endured, with his strong arms
He fastened on my neck, and bellowed out
As he'd burst heaven : threw him on my father ;
Told the most piteous tale of Lear and him,
That ever ear received : which in recounting
His grief grew puissant, and the strings of life
Began to crack."

Kent is continually getting himself into trouble in trying to get others out. Blunt, downright, impassioned alike in his sympathies and his antipathies, he pushes right on as regardless of times and occasions as of himself ; is as intemperate and reckless in virtue as others are in crime : indefatigable in loyalty and affection, he is present whenever there is suffering to be relieved, or treachery to be defeated ; and, while rivalling the worst in endowments of mind, he at the same time rivals the best in a noble use of them : for they have read history to little purpose, who know not that true loyalty is a sentiment that leads a multitude of virtues and nobilities in its train. In his impulsiveness, however, Kent can hardly help doing too much : rash, reckless, I might almost say, fanatical in honesty, he often mars what he would mend, hinders where he would help, injures whom

he would serve: his noble but indiscreet and ill-timed endeavours to arrest, only go to aggravate Lear's judgment on Cordelia, while at the same time they provoke a similar judgment on himself; and, afterwards, his generous rashness and "saucy roughness" in behalf of the king, while it draws on himself the malice of the sister fiends, only quickens and sharpens their persecution of Lear. Such is Kent's virtue; beautiful indeed, but unavailing; nay, the more beautiful for the very reason that it miscarries; so that we cannot help loving the doer most, even when most regretting the deed. But his

"Virtue gives herself light through darkness for to wade ;"

the same noble-heartedness which betrays him into dangers and difficulties, moulds them, as they come, into commodities. His equal attachment to Lear and Cordelia,—an attachment wherein friendship and loyalty go hand in hand,—joined to the sentence which puts it out of his power to serve either, involves him in perplexities wherein I know not whether he discovers more of cunning or of magnanimity. Deprived the opportunities of a loyal subject, and compelled to smuggle in his impassioned loyalty under the disguise of a servant to Lear, he makes his indiscretions subservient to his goodness ;

"In disguise

Following his enemy king, and doing him service

Improper for a slave,"—

"entire affection scorneth nicer hands ;"—so that he appears noblest in mind when lowest in estate. Such

is the deep divine cunning of virtue ; the more it is crushed the more it conquers ; “with darkness and with danger compassed round,” it only breeds occasion thence for still nobler sacrifices ; and when apparently sinking under adversities, before we can drop a tear over its fall, it has turned them into opportunities.

In Kent and the Steward we have one of those effective contrasts with which the poet seldom fails to enrich the harmony of his greater efforts. As the former is the soul of goodness clothed in the assembled nobilities of manhood ; so the latter is the very extract and embodiment of meanness ; two men, than whom, “no contraries hold more antipathy.” To call the Steward wicked, would be to slander and abuse the term ; he is absolutely beneath censure ; an object only of contempt and scorn ; one of those convenient packhorses whereon guilt often rides to its ends. Except the task of smoothing the way for the passions of a wicked mistress, there were no employment base enough for him. None but a reptile, like him, could ever have got hatched into notice in such a noisome atmosphere as Goneril’s society ; otherwise there could not be sympathy enough between them to admit the relation of superior and subaltern. So that, as Coleridge says, “even in this the judgment and invention of the poet are very observable ;—for what else could the willing tool of a Goneril be ? Not a vice but this of meanness was left open to him !”

THE FOOL.

THERE is a strange assemblage of qualities in the Fool’s character, and a strange effect arising from their

union and position, which I am not a little at loss to describe. Coleridge pronounces him a no less wonderful creation than Caliban. He seems almost as necessary to the development of Lear's character as Lear himself is; indeed, he is the common gauge and exponent of all the characters about him,—the mirror in which their finest and deepest lineaments are all reflected. Though a privileged character, with the largest opportunity of seeing, and the largest liberty of speaking, he everywhere turns his privileges into charities, making the immunities of the clown subservient to the noblest sympathies of the man. He is therefore by no means a mere harlequinian appendage, dealing in paste-board quirks and antics, and introduced as an act of courtesy to a local demand; but stands in living connection with the highest passion and pathos of the play: his place bringing him the prerogative of entire familiarity with Lear, without abating in the least our regard for him as a man; so that, though we know him for the king's jester, we respect him quite as much and love him rather more than if he were the king's counsellor. A mixture of buffoonery and benevolence, he uses the former but to express the latter, while the latter continually prompts him to the use of the former; and he makes his folly the vehicle of truths which the king will hear in no other shape, but of which he encourages the utterance by scolding thereat; while at the same time his affectionate tenderness sanctifies all his nonsense, and converts his foolishlest witticisms into wisdom. His being heralded into our presence by the announcement of his pining away at the loss of Cordelia, sends a consecration before him: that his spirit feeds on her presence,

hallows every thing about him ; and even in his jests we feel allowed to "touch what she, by wearing it, hath made divine." Lear manifestly loves him and cleaves to him, partly for his own sake, and partly because he is all there is left of her who was the joy of his old eyes : for we feel a delicate, scarce-discernible play of sympathy between them on Cordelia's account ; the king obviously taking a secret delight in his allusions to her, though he will endure them from nobody else : as a lady in love will sometimes scold her maid for talking, and thereby provoke her to talk the more, of the person whom she would scarce allow another to name in her presence. Lear's touching allusion to the "poor Fool," when Cordelia's death is wringing the cords of his life atwain, and his spirit is struggling to break its prison and follow hers, finishes the story of the love that was between them ;—a love only not so strong as that which was stronger than life, and of which Cordelia was the object. That the Fool's beauty of character triumphs over such disadvantages of place, makes him appear all the more wonderful ; while at the same time Lear is proportionably enhanced in our eye by the fact that his humblest satellite thus turns out a sun.

I know not, therefore, how I can better describe the Fool, than as the soul of pathos in a sort of comic masquerade ; one in whom fun and frolic are sublimed and idealized into tragic beauty ; with the garments of mourning showing through and softened by the lawn of playfulness. In his "labouring to outjest Lear's heart-struck injuries," we see that his wits are set a-dancing by grief ; that his jests are secreted from the depths of a heart struggling with pity and sorrow, as foam enwreathes the

face of deeply-troubled waters. So have I seen the lip quiver and the cheek dimple into a smile, to relieve the eye of a burden it was reeling under, yet ashamed to let fall. There is all along a shrinking, velvet-footed delicacy of step in the Fool's antics, as if, awed by the holiness of the ground, they had put the shoes from off their feet; and he seems bringing diversion to our thoughts, that he may the better steal a sense of woe into our hearts; as grief sometimes puts on a face of mirth, and then gets betrayed by its very disguise. It is truly hard to tell whether the inspired antics, which glitter and sparkle from the surface of his mind, be in more impressive contrast with the dark, tragic scenes into which they are thrown, like rockets into a midnight tempest, or with the undercurrent of deep, tragic thoughtfulness out of which they falteringly issue and play.

GENERAL REMARKS.

As Lear himself seems to me the poet's masterpiece of individual characterization, so the third and fourth acts of the play, and especially the parts where Lear appears, seem his masterpiece of dramatic combination. The fierce raging of the elements around the king, and the fiercer raging of the elements within him; the darkness, the lightning, the torrent, and the blast, all appearing mad with enmity against him, and he himself, thus desperately beset and as desperately befriended, outfacing and shaming the terrific convulsions of nature with his more terrific explosions of passion; his preternatural illumination and utterancy of mind when tottering on

the brink of insanity, as if his pent-up faculties were exulting in their incipient freedom from the ties that hold them in order; his gradual settling into that unnatural calmness which is far more appalling than the fiercest agitation, because it marks the transition from the breaking down of law to the outbreak of anarchy; the towerings of his soul amid its own ruins during his passage into that perfect hallucination, wherein the mind lends an objective validity to its own lawless and disjointed fancies; his loosening and scattering out the mind's hidden jewels in the mad revel of his unbound and dishevelled faculties, until he finally sinks, broken-hearted and broken-witted, into the sleep of utter prostration;—all this, joined to the incessant groanings and howlings of the storm; the wild inspired babblings of the Fool, and the reciprocal gush of sympathy between him and Lear; the desperate fidelity of Kent, outstripping and preventing the malignancies of fortune with his ministries of love; the crazy, bedlamitish jargon of Edgar, whose feigned madness, striking in with Lear's real madness, takes away just enough of its horror and borrows just enough of its dignity to keep either from becoming insupportable, thus begetting harmony from discord itself;—the whole at last dying away into the soft, sweet, solemn discourse of Cordelia, as if the storm had faltered into music upon her coming; and winding up with the reviving of Lear, healed, softened and subdued, “his untuned and jarring senses” calmed and composed, as if a *peace, be still*, had fallen upon his mind the moment his feelings recovered their resting place:—in all this we have “a world's convention of agonies,” whereof every reader's emotions must

confess the power, though perhaps no analysis can ever fathom the secret.

Lear's speeches amid the tempest contain, I think, the grandest exhibition of creative power to be met with in literature. They seem spun out of the very nerves and sinews of the storm. It is the instinct of strong passion to lay hold of whatever objects and occurrences lie nearest at hand, and twist itself a language out of them, incorporating itself with their substance, and reproducing them o'er-informed with its own life. To Lear, accordingly, and to us in his presence, the storm becomes expressive of filial ingratitude; seems spitting its fire, and spouting its water, and hurling its blasts against him. Thus the warring tempest, "the sheets of fire," the "bursts of horrid thunder," the "groans of roaring wind and rain," take all their meaning from his mind; are instinct with his passion; become invisible to him and to us save as instruments and expressions of filial enmity. This is human passion in its utmost stress and outlay of creative energy, literally "drawing all things into one," moulding and organizing the world, as it were, into the embodiment of a single thought.

"Nor rain, wind, thunder, fire, are my daughters:
I tax not you, ye elements, with unkindness,
I never gave you kingdom, called you children,
You owe me no subscription; then let fall
Your horrible pleasure; here I stand, your slave,
A poor, infirm, weak, and despised old man:—
But yet I call you servile ministers,
That have with two pernicious daughters joined
Your high-engendered battles 'gainst a head
So old and white as this. O! O! 'tis foul!

In this plenipotence of imagination, thus seizing and outwrestling and crushing the embattled elements into its service, there is a sublimity almost too vast for our thoughts.

The scene between Edgar and the eyeless Gloster, where the latter is made to believe himself ascending and leaping from the chalky cliff of Dover, is a remarkable instance of the poet's power to overcome the inherent incredibility of a thing by his opulence of description. Great as is the miracle of Gloster's belief, it is authenticated to our feelings by the array of vivid, truthful imagery that induces it. Thus does Shakspeare, as occasion requires, enhance the beauty of his representation, so as to atone for its want of verisimilitude. When a thing cannot be made beautiful by its truth, he makes it too beautiful not to seem true.

It is well known, that a certain "word-joiner" has favoured the world with a Tatification of this play. In like manner certain others have versified the Psalms for us; and then, as in the case of Shakspeare, a portion of Christendom had the good taste to prefer their versification to the Psalms as God and David wrote them. The chief merit of the Tatified Lear was, that the king and Cordelia came off triumphant; so that the play wound up with a happy catastrophe: or rather, in this arrangement the catastrophe is thrown back into the third or fourth act; so that, instead of a drama beginning at one end and ending at the other, we have a nameless thing beginning at both ends and ending in the middle. And yet Dr. Johnson gave to this miserable work the suffrage of his great name. The gift may drag down the giver; it can never, never raise up the

receiver! Tate, however, succeeded in dwarfing and dementing the play, so that the most dull and prosaic mind could relish it; for which cause it has kept and keeps possession of the stage. Why, the catastrophe, as it stands, is the sublimest one in the whole Shakspearian drama. There is an awful beauty in Lear's sighing and gazing his life away over the lifeless form of Cordelia, such as can nowhere else be found; pathos enough to melt the stubbornest heart, and wring tears of confession from insensibility itself. It is the crowning glory of the whole play, which sets the seal to all the glories that have gone before, and without which they are aimless and meaningless. The cutting out of the precious Fool, and the turning of Cordelia into a sort of lovesick intriguante, feigning indifference in order to cheat and enrage her father, and make him abandon her to a forbidden match with Edgar, completes this shameless, this execrable piece of dementation. Tate improve Lear? Set a tailor at work, rather, to improve Niagara! Withered be the hand, palzied be the arm, that ever dares to touch one of Shakspeare's plays! The same sacrilegious spirit that committed this abominable desecration of them, also undertook to improve some of the finest architecture in England, and of course spoilt it. But Tate lived and worked in and for that age of polished, genteel heathenism, sometimes called the Augustan Age of English literature; an age which, with its barrenness of imagination, and its pride and pruriency of understanding, was of course too wise and too irreligious to produce or appreciate scarce any works of art but such as were resolvable into elegant, lifeless, expressionless surface.

LECTURE XV.

TRAGEDY OF OTHELLO.

DR. JOHNSON'S CRITICISM—IAGO AND RODERIGO.

DR. JOHNSON winds up his excellent remarks on Othello by saying, "Had the scene opened in Cyprus, and the preceding incidents been occasionally narrated, there had been little wanting to a drama of the most exact and scrupulous regularity." This remark of course implies that the play would have been improved by such an alteration. The improvement would have dispensed with the whole of the first act, which, by the way, is among the best things in the poet's works, and favoured us, instead, with various soliloquies on matters of history ; that is, with narrations in the form of soliloquy, but addressed to the audience. In which case the speakers would perform the part of a chorus, making their appearance not so much to carry forward the action, as to bring up the audience while the action stood still : like Edmund in the Tatified Lear, they would come forward talking to themselves indeed, yet saying what had no meaning, but that it was intended for the hearing of others. Here, then, would be two palpable improprieties,—the turning of the actor into an orator by putting him in communication with the audience, and the making him soliloquize matter inconsistent with the nature

of the soliloquy.—Dr. Johnson was a great and good man; and I should feel that I were wanting in self-respect, to mention his name with irreverence: but English criticism had not then disenthralled itself from that greatest of all literary absurdities, the doctrine of the unities; and Dr. Johnson, brave old soul as he was, was almost terrified at his own boldness in taking so high a stand as he did in favour of Shakspeare.

But, to say nothing of the greater irregularity involved in the desired improvement, all the deeper and richer meaning of the first act would be lost in narration. If, indeed, this meaning were communicable in the narrative form, the dramatic form might as well be dispensed with altogether. For the only rational ground of the drama is, that action conveys something that cannot be done up in propositions; so that I hazard nothing in saying, that if occasional narrative could supply the place of the first act in *Othello*, there would be nothing left for representation to do. I will go further: This unnecessary act, as it is called, is the one which we could least afford to spare; it being in effect fundamental to the others, and necessary to a right understanding of them.

Critics, it seems to me, have often fallen into error by looking for too much simplicity of purpose in works of art. They have told us, for example, that the object of the drama is, to represent actions, and that, to keep the work clear of redundancies, the action must be one, with a beginning, a middle, and an end; as if all the details, whether of events or persons, were merely for the sake of the catastrophe. Thus they seem to have presumed, that no one thing could be well understood, unless it were detached from every thing else. Such is

not the method of nature : in her works we everywhere meet with great complexity of purpose ; to accomplish any one aim, she carries many aims along together. In like manner, the appropriate merit of a work of art, its truth to nature, lies in the harmony of many co-ordinate and concurrent purposes. Such a work should stand out, not as a flat abstraction, but as a round plump fact ; not as a mere line or surface pointing but in one direction and authorizing but one inference, but as a solid many-sided thing pointing in a thousand directions and authorizing a thousand inferences. Unity of effect is indeed essential ; but true unity as distinguished from mere oneness of effect comes, in art as in nature, by complexity of purpose ;—a complexity wherein each purpose is alternately the means and end of the others ; as in human society we cannot tell whether the state is more for individuals, or individuals more for the state, because each is in turn and alike the means and end of the other.

Whether the aim of the drama be more to evolve action, or character, or passion, cannot be affirmed, because these are in the nature of things mutually complementary, and neither of them can be, save in vital union with the others. Doubtless, however, if any one object be paramount in the drama, it is the development of character ; this being the common substratum of the other two : but the complication and interaction of several characters is necessary to the development of any one ; the persons serving as the play-ground of each other's transpirations, and reciprocally furnishing motives, impulses and occasions. For every society, whether actual or dramatic, is a *concrecence* of individuals ;

—individuals living not merely beside, but in, from, through and for those about them : men do not grow and develope alone, but by and into each other ; and many have to grow up together in order for any one to grow. Even the best part of their individual life comes and must come through or from the social organization : and as they are made, so they must be studied ; as no man can grow by himself, so none can be understood by himself ; as his character is partly derived, so it must be partly interpreted, from the particular state of things in which he lives. So that, to understand any one character, we have to study many characters ; indeed, the knowledge of an individual involves a knowledge of the society to which he belongs.

Perhaps it is from oversight of these things, that certain critics have argued the superfluity of the first act in *Othello*. If the rise, progress and result of the Moor's jealousy, granting his passion to be jealousy, which, by the way, it is not, were the only object of the work, the first act might indeed be dispensed with. But we must first know something of his character and of the characters that act upon him, before we can decide, and in order to decide, whether his passion be jealousy or not ; whether he acts for revenge or for justice. This knowledge the first act ought to give us, and probably will give us, if we be not too wise to consult it.

Again : We often speak of men as acting thus or thus, according as they are thus or thus influenced from without. And in one sense this is true ; but not in such a sense but that it is rather the man that determines the motives than the motives that determine the man : for we often see the same influences moving men

in different and even opposite directions, according to their several pre-formations and predispositions of character; so that the same thing is with one a motive to virtue, with another a motive to vice, and with a third no motive at all. And, on the other hand, where the outward motions coincide, the inward springs are often quite distinct and even reverse: so that we cannot interpret a man's actions aright, without a presentiment of his actuating principle; without some forecast of what he is, we cannot understand what he does: in short, while his actions are the only index of his character, his character is the only light whereby that index can be read. The first business, then, of the dramatist is, to give some preconception of the characters which may render their actions intelligible, and which may in turn receive additional illustration in and through the actions. The right method of the work lies in imparting at the outset a sort of prophetic insight of the persons, not, indeed, so that we can foresee what they will do, but so that we can see what they are doing and why; as the prophecy and fulfilment always interpret each other, and we can never understand either until we have them both.

Now, considering Shakspeare's alleged want of order and method, there are few things in his works more wonderful than, what several others have remarked upon, the judgment evinced in his first scenes; and perhaps the finest example of this is in the opening of *Othello*. The play begins strictly at the beginning, and goes regularly forward, instead of beginning in the middle, as Dr. Johnson would have it, and then going both ways: it starts with the disclosure of precisely

what is necessary to the understanding of all that follows, and what is in turn rendered more and more intelligible by every subsequent development. Into the opening scenes are gathered the prolific germs from which the whole work is evolved; the seminal ideas, of which all the details are the natural issues and offshoots: in a word, the first act is emphatically the seminary of the whole play; contains the original text, of which the following acts are the appropriate comments: the one unfolding the characters in their principles; the others, in their phenomena. It is the overlooking or rejecting of what is there disclosed, that has caused so much misconception of what follows. Assuming the first act to be useless or of little account, and that the rest could be understood as well without it, critics have naturally enough concluded Othello to be actuated by jealousy and Iago by revenge. Finding, however, on this ground, no sufficient motive for Iago's course, they have been forced to pronounce the character unnatural; and have made Othello out a liar in saying he "did nought in hate, but all in honour;" but have nowhere informed us why it is, that we respect the noble Moor so much, while, by their account, we ought only to detest him. I shall be obliged to take very different ground from this in regard to both these characters; and the aforesaid unnecessary act contains, I doubt not, matter enough wherewith to refute all such criticisms. . If, indeed, it did not, perhaps the play had better be burned than criticized.

IAGO AND RODERIGO.

THE first cause, the *primum mobile*, of most of the passions and proceedings, of all in fact that make directly for the catastrophe, is Iago; and to understand what he is made of and moved by, we need not go beyond the first act. Indeed, the very first words he utters betray the actuating principle of his conduct. Roderigo, it seems, has for some time been suing for Desdemona's hand, and has employed Iago to aid him in the suit, paying his service in advance. The play opens pat upon the Moor's elopement with her; whereupon Roderigo, presuming Iago to have been in the secret of their intention, breaks out:

"Never tell me, I take it much unkindly,
That thou, Iago,—who hast had my purse,
As if the strings were thine,—should'st know of this;"

meaning, of course, the intended elopement. Iago replies;

"But you will not hear me:—
If ever I did dream of such a matter,
Abhor me."

"Thou told'st me," continues Roderigo, "thou didst hold him in thy hate." "Despise me, if I do not," says Iago; and then goes on to allege certain reasons for his hatred. Here the ruling passion of Iago's mind breaks out in his forms of imprecation: the expressions, "abhor me," and "despise me," thus dropping from him unawares, when, to gain credit to his assertions, he

would naturally invoke upon himself what he most fears, inform us that pride is the thing whereby he is habitually moved.

Bad men always take especial delight in wielding the causes and instruments of their own sufferings. Accordingly, as contempt is the thing Iago most dreads and shrinks from, so it is what he takes most pride and pleasure in expressing. And he naturally vents it most freely on those very qualities in others which he most values in himself; as intense covetousness often tries to hide itself in hatred or scorn of the rich. So that Iago's sneering soon afterwards at Cassio's intellectual gifts and attainments, and at the Moor as "loving his own pride and purposes," sufficiently intimates what sort of pride he is possessed with. It is pride of intellect and self-will. To "know all qualities with a learned spirit," and to "plume up his will," these are the things he most covets and prides himself upon. This is one of the many instances wherein Shakspeare has made his characters unwittingly reveal themselves in attempting to describe others.

As if on purpose to prevent any mistake as to Iago's springs of action, he is introduced in a connection, and shown up in various aspects having no direct bearing on the main action of the play. He comes before us exercising, or rather, indulging his faculties on the dupe Roderigo, and thereby spilling out the secret of his habitual motives and impulses. That Iago's frankness may rather heighten than lessen our opinion of his sagacity, Roderigo is seen at once to be a person whose strength of passion, weakness of understanding and want of character will prevent his sticking at the other's

open professions of villany. So that the freedom with which Iago here unmasks himself but lets us into his keen perception of his whens and hows; evinces his quick sharp insight of character: we see from it that he thoroughly knows his man; knows that the surest way to win Roderigo's entire confidence is by just such self-disclosures as, were he not made to be duped, would but fill him with fear and distrust.

The ground of their connection, we are informed in the outset, is the purse. Roderigo thinks all the while, that he is bribing and buying up Iago's talents and efforts; as weak purse-proud men naturally exult in their power of hiring others to do for them what they lack the courage or ability to do for themselves. All this, too, Iago knows and intends; he knows that the gull wants some work done which none but a villain can do, and that he has the money to pay for doing it: indeed, it is somewhat doubtful which glories most, the one in having the money to bribe talents, or the other in having the wit to command money. Yet we can easily see it is not so much the money that Iago cares for as the fun of wheedling and swindling others out of it. With a pride of intellectual mastery far stronger than his love of lucre, he delights not so much in the having as in the getting of money; for the successful pursuit brings at once an excitement of mind and a gratification of vanity, both of which the mere possession excludes.

But while Iago is giving pledges of assistance to Roderigo the stubborn fact remains that he is in the service of Othello; and Roderigo cannot well understand how he can serve two masters at once whose interests are so

conflicting. In order, therefore, to engage Roderigo's faith without forsaking the Moor, he has to persuade the former, that he follows the latter "but to serve his turn upon him;" or, as he afterwards expresses it, that "in following the Moor he but follows himself." A hard task indeed; hard at least to anybody but our ancient, but for that very reason only the more grateful to him, because from its peril and perplexity it requires the greater stress of cunning, and gives the wider scope for his ingenuity. The very anticipation of the thing oils and gladdens his faculties into ecstasy: his heart seems dancing with a paroxysm of joy while he vents his passion for hypocrisy; as if this most satanical of attributes served him for a muse, and inspired him with an energy and eloquence not his own. The unction and enthusiasm with which he pours forth the profession of hypocrisy, are a proof that he enjoys, and therefore a pledge that he will succeed in, the performance. Having just before disclosed his great dread of contempt, his expressions of contempt for honesty are of course the best evidence he can give, that he himself will not be chargeable with it.

In order, however, to make his scheme work on Roderigo, our ancient is obliged to produce some reasons for his purpose touching the Moor; for Roderigo is too much of a philosopher to believe a man can commit such acts without sufficient motives. Dupe though he be, he is not so easily dupable as to entrust his cause to a groundless and gratuitous treachery; he must know something of the strong provocations which have led Iago to cherish such dark designs. All this Iago perfectly understands; knows precisely what promises to

make, and with what pretexts to back them up : he even anticipates Roderigo's scepticism on this point, and, to overcome it, is as inventive of reasons for his malice as his malice is reasonless. He pretends a secret grudge against the Moor ; a violent, deep-seated enmity towards him, which he is but holding in until he can find or make a fit occasion ; and therewithal assigns such grounds and motives as he knows will secure faith in his pretence : whereupon Roderigo gets so absorbed in anticipating the fruits of his treachery as to forget the possibility of any similar designs on himself. Wonderful indeed are the arts whereby the rogue wins and maintains his ascendancy over the gull. During their conversation we can almost see the former worming and wiring himself into the latter like a corkscrew into a cork.

But Iago has, if possible, a still harder task to carry Roderigo along in a criminal quest of Desdemona ; for Roderigo's character is marked rather by want of principle than by bad principle, and the passion with which the lady has inspired him is incompatible with a wish to dishonour her, or at least with the audacity to attempt her dishonour. Until the proceedings before the senate he hopes her father will be able to interrupt and break off the match with Othello, so that she will again be open to an honourable solicitation : but when he finds her already married, and himself completely nonsuited by her father's ratification of the match, he is resolved to give up in despair. But Iago again besets him, like an evil angel, and plies his arts with still more determined vigour. Himself an entire atheist of female virtue, he has no way to gain his point but by debauching Rode-

rigo's mind with his own atheism ; knows he can engage him in the "unlawful solicitation" only by persuading him there is no worth in the lady to deserve better treatment, nor any wrong in treating her as she deserves. To do this Iago employs whatever ascendancy he has, while at the same time the doing of it completes his ascendancy. By this conquest Roderigo falls entirely under his power ; can be moulded entirely to his will : indeed, the process involves a transfusion of Iago's spirit into him so far as he has room to receive it.

With an overweening pride of wealth Roderigo unites considerable respect for womanhood. Iago, therefore, at once flatters his pride by urging the power of money, and inflames his passion by urging the frailty of woman ; for the greatest preventive of dishonourable passion, is faith in the virtue and strength of its object. Throughout this undertaking Iago's passionless soul revels amid its lewd licentious thoughts and images like a spirit broke loose from the pit. Senseless or reckless of every thing good, but keenly alive to whatever can be made available for his purpose, his mind acts like a sieve, to strain out all the wine and reserve only the lees of womanhood ; which lees he takes pleasure in holding up as the main constituents and characteristics of the sex. With his nimble ready fancy, his facility and felicity of combination, fertile, fluent and apposite in plausibilities, he literally overwhelms Roderigo's power of resistance ; carries his understanding by storm ; and thus stifles his ability to refute while stimulating his inclination to believe what is said. By frequently iterating the phrase, "put money in your purse," as though faith in the omnipotence of money

had engrossed his whole mind, he tries to make up in earnestness of assertion whatever may be wanting in the cogency of his reasoning, and, in proportion as Roderigo's mind lacks room for his arguments, to subdue him by mere violence of impression. Glorifying alike in mastery of intellect and of will, he would absorb Roderigo's being entirely into his own; would so make him part and parcel of himself, like his hand or his foot, as to be the immediate instrument of his own volitions. Nothing can surpass the jubilant ferocity, the ineffably-fiendish chuckle of self-satisfaction, with which he turns from his conquest to sneer at the victim:—

“Thus do I ever make my fool my purse:
For I mine own gained knowledge should profane,
If I would time expend with such a snipe,
But for my sport and profit.”

So much for Iago's proceedings with the gull. The sagacity with which he feels and forescents his way into Roderigo is equalled only by the skill with which he makes the ground, wherever he sees it deficient, before he ventures upon it. He thus turns one achievement into a vantage-ground of another achievement; while gathering the spoils of one conquest he prepares the subject, by a sort of forereaching process, for a further conquest.—Roderigo's mind, if not preoccupied with vices, is empty of virtues: so that Iago has but to coquette with his weaknesses, to work upon his passion and vanity, and ruin him through these. But Othello has no such avenues open; has neither the vices nor the weaknesses for Iago to work upon; so that the vil-

lain can reach him only through his virtues ; has to work his ruin by turning his honour and integrity against him. Thus the same piercing insight, the same exquisite tact of character, which prompts his frankness to Roderigo, counsels the utmost closeness to Othello. Knowing the Moor's noble qualities, that he is the soul of honour and magnanimity, he knows that the least offer of dishonest or dishonourable services would but alienate his confidence and provoke his resentment. He therefore confesses himself a villain, or professes himself the reverse, according to the person he has to deal with and the end he has in view : with equal facility and equal success he recommends himself to Roderigo as a tool that he may use him, and to the Moor as a friend that he may betray him.

Iago, however, is quite prudent and reasonable in his professions : though moral enough for all practical purposes, he nevertheless avoids seeming to value himself upon his morality : hence it is, perhaps, that he succeeds so much better than most hypocrites. Nay, he rather modestly acknowledges his virtues than boasts of them ; confesses that he " holds it very stuff o' the conscience, to do no contrived murder," and that he " lacks iniquity sometimes, to do him service ;" as though, being a soldier, he feared these things might speak more for his virtue than for his manhood, and so were rather to be forgiven than commended. In short, he takes care not to whiten the sepulchre so much as to provoke an investigation of the contents ; for he knows that when one appears too good, we are apt to suspect he has cultivated appearances somewhat. And yet his reputation for honesty and the pleasure he manifestly takes in being thought

honest, have something suspicious about them. For the man of true honesty is rather annoyed than gratified with being called honest; the publicity seems to dispute the integrity of his conduct; from its being known he suspects himself to have been vain of it, and thus corrupted it into something else: just as the truly charitable man tries to hide his charity; dare not trust himself to let it out, lest he should get to doing it with a view to its being known,—which, of course spoils it;—he feels that in secrecy alone is there any ground for magnanimity; and that the more his charity is known, the less assurance he has that it is charity and not vanity. Therefore it is, perhaps, that people are naturally ashamed of these and kindred virtues in proportion as they have them, and vain of them in proportion as they lack them.

In his practising upon the Moor Iago intermixes confession and pretension in such a way, that the one is taken only as proof of modesty, the other of fidelity. When, for example, he confesses,

“It is his nature’s plague,
To spy into abuses; and, oft, his jealousy
Shapes faults that are not;”

he obviously conveys, and means to convey a contrary impression. To accredit his accusation of others, he cunningly prefaces it by accusing himself; knowing the generous-minded Moor will not believe he has the faults since he has the honesty to confess them. It is one of the instances so frequent in actual life, wherein people acknowledge real vices to persuade others they are free from them. For nothing is so sure to gain one a favourable hearing as the appearance of self-distrust; and the

arguments we urge against our own judgment, if they have the air of sincerity, are apt to produce, and sometimes, as in the case of Iago, are meant to produce an opposite effect.

If Iago deals in truth at all, he is careful to use only those half truths which are always worse than none, because sure to be mistaken for the whole ; so that he is really but the more a liar for using them. Always acting, moreover, as though he meant to be right, yet feared he was wrong, his very opinions have the weight of facts, because they seem to have forced themselves upon him against his will, and through his exceeding consciousness. That he may avoid the appearance of being an informer, a thing for which he knows Othello would despise him, his first words seem to have fallen from him unawares, as though he were thinking so intensely that he could not choose but think aloud. His mind seems struggling with some terrible secret which he dare not let out, yet cannot keep in ; which breaks from him in spite of himself, and even because he dare not utter it. In a word, he takes equal care to *be* heard and to seem *overheard*, to the end that he may not be held responsible for what he says, nor required to prove its truth any more than if he had spoken in his sleep. He then excuses himself from disclosing what he thinks by the terrible consequences to others, which hang upon the disclosure ; an excuse which he knows will excite and means shall excite the most painful prying curiosity. In those well-known lines ;

“ Good name in man and woman,
Is the immediate jewel of their souls :
Who steals my purse steals trash ;—

But he that filches from me my good name,
Robs me of that which not enriches him,
And makes me poor indeed ;” —

he but gives out, that he is restrained only by a high regard for others from uttering what would blast them. And there is withal a dark frightful significance in his manner, which at once excites suspicion and challenges investigation : the more he refuses to tell, the more he sharpens the desire to know, his thoughts : when questioned, he so states his reasons for not speaking that they operate only as reasons why he should speak, and that Othello cannot help constraining him to speak. In short, he appears to have a secret so important for the Moor to know that he dare not divulge it to him ; and thus literally compels the Moor to extort it from him. For his avowed purpose is, not merely to deceive Othello, but to get his thanks for deceiving him ; to

“ Make the Moor thank me, love me, and reward me
For making him egregiously an ass,
And practising upon his peace and quiet
Even to madness ;”

such is his aim, such the least that will content him.

From what hath been said, it would seem, that in Iago intellectuality itself is made a character ; that is, the intellect has cast off all allegiance to the moral and religious sentiments, and become a law and an impulse unto itself ; so that the mere fact of his being able to do a thing is sufficient reason for doing it : nay, the more wicked it is, and the more dangerous and difficult from its wickedness, the more pride and pleasure

he takes in doing it: in a word, his actuating principle seems to be a lust and pride of intellect and will, which finds its dearest gratification in the annulling or reversing of moral distinctions.

For in such cases there is naturally a self-engendered activity of intellect: the mind comes to act, not for any outward ends or objects, but merely for the sake of acting; gets impatient of rest and reckless of consequences; has a passion for feats of agility and strength; is greedy of doing something, of bringing something to pass; and may even go so far as to revel and riot amid the very dangers and difficulties of wicked enterprises. We thus have, not indeed a craving for carnal indulgences, but a dry, frigid, prurient intellectuality, or, as another hath finely expressed it, *a lust of the brain*, which frequently and naturally manifests itself in a fanaticism of intrigue, an enthusiasm for mischief, a sort of hungering and thirsting after unrighteousness: for it need hardly be said, that though there are no Iagos, there are many very Iagoish men in the world; men whose fingers are always itching to pull some infernal wires.

Such, then, I take it, is essentially the character of Iago; and this prolific idea will, I doubt not, furnish a satisfactory explanation of all his doings and designs. Of course, therefore, he never falls into any sensualities: on the contrary, all his acts and desires are eminently spiritual and satanical; his passions are all concentrated in the head; so that he scorns and abjures the lusts of the flesh; or, if he indulges them at all, generally does it in a criminal way, and not so much for the sake of the indulgence as of the criminality it involves.—We

are apt, indeed, to think and speak of sin as consisting mainly in the reign of the senses, the subjection of the reason to the flesh: but it consists much rather in subjecting every thing to our minds, making our reason the test and measure of truth, our will the source and standard of law. Such, indeed, appears to be the motive principle of the devil, who, so far as we know, is neither a glutton, nor a wine-bibber, nor a debauchee, but an impersonation of pride and self-will; that is, a very moral and irreligious personage; one who looks up to nobody but himself, and scorns to recognize any wisdom or authority above his own reason; unteachable, ungovernable: accordingly he is the first created being that we read of, who attempted self-government. It is probably for these reasons, that he sometimes appears even jealous of carnal sins, as being inimical to those nobler sins of pride and self-will wherein he specially delights; and that he so often sets men to railing at the former as a diversion of their minds while he steals the latter into them. And for the same reason he sometimes aids, apparently, in reforming the manners of men, that he may the better make sure of their minds; and even fortifies them against sensual vices by inspiring them with a high conceit of virtue, which is of course more grateful to him: whereas nature often surprises and betrays men into sensual vices, that she may twist them into a scourge to whip down their pride; for "our virtues would be proud, if our faults whipped them not." Something too much of this.

It is worthy of remark, that Iago has a peculiar classification whereby all the movements of our nature fall under the two heads of sensual and rational: "nature

has given us one scale of reason to poise another of sensuality ; and the thing we call love is but a scion of the latter.”—The healthy mind is marked by peculiar openness to influences and impressions from without ; is apt to be overmastered by the inspiration of external objects ; in which case the understanding is kept subordinate to the social, moral and religious sentiments. Wherefore if, for example, a man grows old without falling in love, we naturally infer, either that there is not much in him, or that what there is, is very much diseased. But our wise ancient despises all this. Man, argues he, is made up altogether of intellect and appetite ; and whatever motions do not spring from the former must be referred to the latter. To be overmastered by external objects, implies a conquest of the flesh over the mind : the yielding to inspirations from without argues an ignoble want of spiritual force : the sentiments of love, honour, reverence, in short, all the religions of our nature,—the very principles which, had they power as they have right, would control all our thoughts and actions,—according to this liberal and learned spirit are but “a lust of the blood and a permission of the will,” and therefore things which he looks down upon with contempt. Hence, whenever he thinks or speaks of the wedded lovers, his mind only finds or breeds matter for impious and obscene jests ; and he knows no homage to womanhood but the overflowings of a scurrilous and profane levity.

But the truth is, Iago has, properly speaking, no susceptibilities ; his mind is perfectly unimpressible, receives nothing, yields to nothing, but cuts its way through every thing like a flint. Thus his mental violence and viru-

lence precludes the feeling of moral qualities, as such ; he has become so intellectual as to lose the perception of them altogether ; and of course he is not so weak as to admit the existence of what he cannot see. Wherefore, in speaking of persons he is “ nothing, if not critical ;” for he studies them, as professed critics do books, only to pass judgment upon them ; uses them but as occasions to exercise and evince his own acuteness ; pulls up every flower, however beautiful, to find a flaw in the root, and of course flaws the root in pulling it. As might be expected, therefore, he is an accomplished satirist ; and the severity of his satire is in proportion to the excellence of its subject ; as death breeds the most offence out of what was fairest in life : for, to a mind so filled with pride of knowledge, commendation of any thing naturally goes against the grain.

In my remarks upon Edmund I said, he did not so much make war on morality as shift her out of the way to make room for his wit : seeing the road clear to his desires but for moral restraints, he rather laughs off than braves those restraints ; is very polite to them, though somewhat waggish withal, and respectfully bows them out of door, lest they should hinder or harass the working of his faculties. Iago differs from Edmund in that he will rather invade than elude the laws of morality ; seeing duty coming, he takes no pains to play round and get by her, but rather goes out of his way to meet her, as if on purpose to spit in her face and walk over her ; instead of trying to evade or shuffle off the obligations of right, he coolly invokes them into his presence, to brave them. That he ought not to do a thing is thus his strongest motive for doing it ; the worse the deed,

the more it shows his freedom and power. When he confesses to himself that "the Moor, howbeit that he endures him not, is of a constant, loving, noble nature;" it is not so much that he really feels these qualities in him, as that, granting him to have them, there is the greater triumph in hating him. For to dislike a man for his faults is but an ordinary thing; anybody can do that: but to dislike a man for his virtues is somewhat original; involves something like a declaration of moral independence. So, also, in the soliloquy where he speaks of himself as loving Desdemona, after disclaiming any unlawful passion for her he adds, parenthetically and as if addressing his Maker, "though, peradventure, I stand accountant for as great a sin:" as much as to say, that whether guilty or not, he did not care, and dared the responsibility at all events; that he scorned, not feared the crime; or rather, disclaimed it, that he might have to boast of a greater. So that here, to adopt a distinction from Dr. Chalmers, he seems not so much an atheist as an antitheist in morality; acknowledges his Maker but to brave him; glories in putting his foot on the Law, looking Heaven in the face meanwhile with a sort of defiant smile!

That Iago prefers lying to telling the truth, is implied in what I have been saying; such a preference, indeed, is inseparable from his inordinate intellectuality: for so far is a man from necessarily loving truth in proportion as he is intellectual, that, strange as it may seem, he may get so very intellectual as to prefer lies, as affording greater scope for activity and display of mind. For we could not, if we would, take credit to ourselves for thriving by the truth; since in that case our thrift

would seem the truth's work, not ours ; and, coming as a gift, would rather humble than elate us. Indeed, the general order of Providence is so much on the side of virtue, that the truly virtuous attribute their success to causes out of themselves, and are therefore more apt to give thanks for it than to glory in it. Moreover, the results of right action are generally too remote from the action itself to flatter our pride of power ; we cannot appropriate them ; our agency is so interwoven with others, that we cannot engross to ourselves the merit of the consequences : the bread which we cast upon the waters is so long in returning, and undergoes so many changes in the passage, that when it comes we cannot identify it as ours ; we therefore receive it as a favour, not reclaim it as a right. Thus does nature try to keep us from conceit of well-doing, by hiding from us the good we do ; for if we could sow the seed and reap the harvest the same day, it is hardly questionable to whom we should attribute our blessings. Wherefore, when we hear a man saying, as we often may, Behold, how much good I am doing ! we have a right to presume, that he is doing nothing but evil. Indeed, he who truly means to do good, and not merely to get the pay for doing it, never says any such thing ; content to obey, he works and waits, and keeps still about it.

On the other hand, to succeed by lying, looks like outwrestling Providence and inverting the order of things : we can thus reckon ourselves an overmatch for truth, and credit all our thrift to our own power ; we seem to owe none of it to nature, but rather to have wrung it out in spite of her ; to have been her antagonist, and carried the day against her : which appears to be the

scope and style of Iago's ambition : that he may not be obliged to share the praise of his success with truth and nature, he prefers to enter the lists against them. Indeed, his proper delight, his characteristic satisfaction, seems to consist in keeping up a sort of inversion between appearance and reality ; for example, in causing himself to be thought true in proportion as he is false, and others false in proportion as they are true ; which inversion probably involves the highest possible gratification of intellectual pride. For, to make virtue pass for virtue, and pitch for pitch, is no triumph at all : but to make virtue pass for pitch, and pitch for virtue, is a triumph indeed. Iago glories in seeming able thus to convict appearances of untruth ; in compelling nature, as it were, to own her secret deceptions and acknowledge him too much for her. Hence his labouring so strenuously to appear as if serving Roderigo, while really using him. Hence his purpose not merely to deceive Othello, but to get his thanks for deceiving him. Hence his avowed intention respecting Desdemona :

“ So will I turn her virtue into pitch ;
And out of her own goodness make the net,
That shall enmesh them all.”

Therefore it is that he takes such a malicious pleasure in turning her character and conduct wrongside out : therefore it is that he so much delights in unsettling and outreasoning the convictions of others concerning her. For the more an angel she is, the more he triumphs in making her seem a devil.

As Desdemona is composed and framed of female

delicacy and honour, there is of course a principle of religious awe in her love for the Moor; and even in her smiles of fondness there is an infusion of awful respect: she fears as well as loves him; nay, the more she loves, the more she fears him, and even flies to him, and clings to him as a protection from the very fear which his presence inspires. Gifted with the same insight of her as of the other characters, Iago reminds the Moor in a sort of retrospective prophecy, that "when she seemed to shake, and fear his looks, she loved them most;" then, arguing from the apparent contrariety of love and fear, that she artfully *seemed* to fear in order to hide her love, he construes what is in itself proof of the deepest and purest affection into an exquisite piece of hypocrisy to blind her father, lest he should suspect and defeat her intentions. If she could be so skilful in feigning fear to deceive her father, the inference is, that she would be equally skilful in feigning love to deceive her husband. Thus, out of the strongest possible evidences of her purity, he twists arguments of her grossness: because she could not have loved Othello for his person, he shows that she must have loved him for nothing else: because she could not have chosen the Moor but for reasons of perpetual validity, he argues that the ground of her choice must soon breed satiety and disgust: while the outward incongruity of the match really proves that her affection is based upon Othello's "honours and his valiant parts," he turns that incongruity into the basis of a contrary opinion.

But there is no end or bottom to Iago's wicked ingenuity; the resources of his cunning are literally unsearchable: sleepless, unrelenting, inexhaustible, with a

zeal that nothing can tire, and an alertness that nothing can surprise, he anticipates and parries every objection ; the more obstinate the material, the more greedily does he seize it, the more adroitly work it, the more effectually make it tell ; and absolutely persecutes the Moor with a redundancy of proof. When, for example, Othello drops the remark, "and yet, how nature, erring from itself,"—meaning simply that no woman is altogether exempt from frailty ; Iago with indescribable sleight-of-hand immediately steals in upon him, under cover of this remark, a cluster of cunning plausibilities as but so many inferences from the other's suggestion. In this way he succeeds in imparting his own thoughts to the Moor by appearing to derive them from him ; makes Othello, though he has no such stuff in his mind, seem responsible for the villain's own audacious insinuations. For he means that the conviction which he is forcing upon Othello from without shall appear a suspicion generated within him ; that the Moor shall, if possible, think himself acting from jealousy while really acting upon evidence. Thus he labours to complete his intellectual mastery over Othello ; to make him own himself deceived by appearances ; and the more preposterous the conclusion, the greater of course is his triumph in causing it to be received. The Moor is thus brought to see every thing with Iago's mind ; to distrust all his original perceptions, abjure his own impressions, renounce his own understanding, and accept Iago's instead. And such, in fact, is the villain's aim, the very earnest and pledge of his intellectual mastery : nor is there any thing that he seems to enjoy more than the

pain he inflicts by persuading Othello that he is a fool ; that he has been the easy dupe of appearances,—the victim of Desdemona's arts ; and that he owes his deliverance to the superior insight and sagacity of his honest faithful ancient.

But there is indeed scarce any wickedness conceivable into which such a pride and lust of intellect and will may not carry a man. Craving for action of the most exciting kind, there is of course a fascination for him in the very danger of crime. Walking the plain, safe, straightforward path of truth and nature, does not excite and occupy him enough ; he prefers to thread the dark perilous intricacies of some hellish plot, or to balance himself, as it were, on a rope stretched over an abyss, where danger stimulates and success demonstrates his agility. In short, he has an insatiable itching of mind, which finds relief in rushing and rubbing, so to speak, among the briers and brambles of diabolical undertakings. In inverting the proportion between success and desert there is a tension of thought and a triumph of skill, which serve at once to appease his intellectual restlessness and gratify his intellectual pride. It is as if one should carry a habit of dancing among eggs so far as to make an open floor seem vapid and dull. And even if remorse overtake such a man, its only effect is to urge him still deeper into crime ; as the desperate gamester naturally tries to bury his chagrin at past losses in the increased excitement of a larger stake : for remorse, unless attended with penitence, tends but to augment the guilt from which it springs.

Critics, indeed, have puzzled themselves a good deal

about Iago's motives ; but the truth is, as Wordsworth has said of a similar character,

“ Natures such as his
Spin motives out of their own bowels !
—— There needs no other motive
Than that most strange incontinence in crime
Which haunts Iago. Power is life to him
And breath and being ; where he cannot govern,
He will destroy.”

And indeed acting without or against external motives, suits him better than acting according to them ; it falls in more with his ruling propensity, gives greater life and zest to his efforts ; and the stronger those opposing motives, the more is his mind stimulated and his pride gratified in thwarting or reversing them : in short, he exemplifies an innate impulse to evil triumphing over all external motives to good.

If it be objected to this view, that Iago states his motives to Roderigo ; I answer, Iago is a liar, and is trying to dupe and deceive Roderigo : and, though he neither has nor wants any motives, he knows he must allege some to make the other trust him. Or if it be objected, that he states them in the soliloquy where there is no one for him to deceive ; again I answer, Yes there is ; the very one he is most anxious to deceive, namely, himself : for it is but natural that those who habitually lie to others should at last get to lying to themselves ; and, what is more, believe their own lies. And indeed the very terms of this statement clearly denote a foregone conclusion, the motives coming in only as an after-thought : it is the crime that begets the provocation, not

the provocation that suggests the crime ; he has no reasons for the act until he has resolved upon doing it. The truth is, he cannot quite look the intended crime in the face ; it is the biggest and blackest he has ever undertaken ; a little too fiendish for his steady gaze : in a word, his resolution is rather too much for his conscience ; and he tries to hunt up or conjure up some motives to excuse the one to the other. This is what Coleridge justly calls "the motive-hunting of a motiveless malignity ;" and well may he add, "how awful it is !" That Iago has conscience enough left to beg or make some little ground for such a stupendous villany, is what chiefly distinguishes him from the devil ; for, as the author just quoted remarks, he is "a being next to devil, and only not quite devil." Indeed, he is far more devilish than Milton's Satan : for the latter relents at the prospect of ruining the happiness before him, and prefaces the deed with a gush of pity for the victims ; whereas Iago's only thought is :

" O, you are well tuned now !
But I'll set down the pegs that make this music,
As honest as I am !"

Much has been said about Iago's acting from revenge ; but he has no cause for revenge, unless to deserve his love be such a cause. For revenge implies some injury received, real or fancied, and has some discrimination as to its objects ; the very sensibility whence it springs precludes indiscriminate hostility ; so that, if this were his motive, he would respect and spare the innocent, while crushing the guilty ; else there were no revenge in the case. The impossibility, indeed, of accounting

for his conduct on such grounds is the very reason why certain critics, assuming such to be the grounds, have pronounced the character unnatural. It is true, he tries to suspect, first that the Moor, and then, finding this insufficient, that Cassio has wronged him: he even finds or feigns a certain rumour to that effect; yet shows by his manner of talking about it that he himself does not believe it; or rather, does not care whether it be true or not: and he seems to avoid investigating its truth lest the investigation should lose him the pretence which the suspicion affords; for he knows better than to peril the existence of so convenient a thing by testing the strength of its basis. In all which Iago but shows a disposition to conjecture some offence, to surmise some provocation, wherewith to keep the scruples of conscience from disturbing the enjoyment of his infernal plot; for he is too finished an epicure in crime not to foreclose the irruption of such visitors upon his luxury. And indeed he elsewhere owns, that the reasons he alleges are but pretences after all:—

“When devils will their blackest sins put on,
They do suggest at first with heavenly shows,
As I do now.”

Even while using this divinity, he knows it is the “divinity of hell,” else he would scorn to use it; nay, boasts of the intention to entrap his victims through their very friendship for him; as if his obligations to them were his only provocations against them. For, to bad men obligations often are provocations. He even gloats over the prospect of betraying and ruining them through the very qualities for which he ought to love and be-

friend them; and nothing gives him greater joy than the thought of turning the lady's virtue and innocence to the destruction of them all. In short, that he ought to admire and honour them, is, I take it, the "poisonous mineral" that "gnaws his inwards:" the only wrong that they have done him, or that he thinks they have done him, is, that he envies them; and he means to indemnify himself for their superiority by ruining them through the very gifts and virtues for which he envies them. Meanwhile he amuses his reasoning powers by inventing a sort of ex-post-facto motives for his designs: the same restless wicked busy-mindedness which suggested the crime prompts him to play with the possible reasons and motives for it; as men often choose the wrong side of an argument as being better adapted to exercise and exhibit their powers of reasoning.

Finally: Iago seems to have a peculiar species of jealousy; a jealousy springing from intellect and will: he appears to make himself jealous whenever it will serve his turn. Hence, when he finds his plot upon Cassio rather too diabolical for his surviving conscience to face, he has no difficulty in "suspecting Cassio with his night-cap too." Thus jealousy serves him as a sort of extemporary and occasional subterfuge; he lies himself, whenever it will suit his purpose, into a kind of semi-belief that he has been wronged. In short, his jealousy is but the purveyor to his intellectual lust, the jackall which his restless and reckless intellectuality sends ahead to scent out and waylay its prey. In this respect he is not unlike certain gossiping busy-bodies and mischief-makers, those pests and plagues of country villages, whose minds have no repose but in restlessness,

no comfort but in social corrosives ; and who, from mere want of something to do, can at any time suspect their neighbours, and then turn their suspicion into a ground of proceeding against them. Thus they are never without an occasion : no sooner have their minds generated the suspicion than proofs begin to follow in ; a thousand little incidents, which before were scarce thought of, or perhaps remembered only to be admired, begin to wear a new aspect ; they now wonder that they have never seen them in their true light before : and fancy themselves bound by the ties of good neighbourhood to put down the sins which they have had the sagacity to detect ; thus taking credit to themselves for benefiting society while merely indulging a passion for mischief.

LECTURE XVI.

TRAGEDY OF OTHELLO CONTINUED.

OTHELLO—DESDEMONA.

It was a favourite remark of Lord Bacon's, that "to be speculative into another man, to the end to know how to work him, and wind him, and govern him, proceedeth from a heart that is double and cloven, and not entire and ingenuous." If such be the character of one who goes about to work, and wind, and govern others, he would naturally seek his victims among those of an opposite character; for to attempt those minded like himself, would argue a want of that very tact and sagacity whereby he is to succeed. So that, in such an undertaking, we should look to see the man of cunning against the man of honour; the man of ignoble arts against the man of noble mind; the man of a double and cloven heart against the man whose heart is entire and ingenuous: which, it seems to me, very truly expresses the nature of the contrast between Iago and Othello.

That such is Othello's character, is not only to be presumed from Iago's undertaking to overreach and entrap him, but is to be gathered and inferred from what Iago says about him:

"Three great ones of the city,
In personal suit to make me his lieutenant,

Off-capped to him : ———

But he, as loving his own pride and purposes,
Evades them, with a bombast circumstance,
Horribly stuffed with epithets of war ;
And, in conclusion, nonsuits
My mediators ; *for, certes, says he,*
I have already chose my officer."

Against whom would a shrewd, scoffing, malignant rogue like Iago be most likely to utter such sneers as these, of "loving his own pride and purposes," and of using "a bombast circumstance horribly stuffed with epithets of war?" None, it seems to me, but a man of the highest honour and integrity would appear, in the view of Iagoism, such a pompous strutting ineffectuality as Iago here represents the Moor to be.

For a truly upright, honourable man naturally disdains to be the advocate or apologist of himself: it is enough that he stands justified to his own sense of right; and he will not stoop to justify himself to those who are entitled, after all, but to hold an opinion. If others dislike his course, his proper answer is, that he did not take it to please them, and was not bound to seek their approbation. Besides, such a man will as little allow others to trespass upon his authority as he will allow himself to transcend it. He acts from his own mind, not from theirs, and expects them to confide in him so far as to presume the thing is right because he has done it. To explain his conduct, save where he is responsible, looks like trying to convince them he is right, like soliciting their endorsement of his course, as though the consciousness of rectitude were not enough to support him. Moreover, true honour always desires to be

its own reward, and it ceases to be its *own* reward when it seeks a reward in the approval of others ; that is, it is then no longer honour, but mere ambition. The subject, therefore, of such a sentiment naturally surrenders himself to his own convictions, fearlessly leaving it to the results to vindicate his course.

To subtle, crafty, intriguing men the answers of such a man, when urged with their questions, seem haughty and grandiloquent. Speaking from honour not from strategy, his reply seems bombastic and absurd to mere strategists, partly because it is above their comprehension, and partly because it implies a reproach on their own low-thoughtedness.

But heroism, how ridiculous soever it may seem to the eye of cunning, is very apt to succeed ; for, if it does not convince the reason of men, it takes their feelings, and men may be led much farther by the heart than by the head.—Though the knave naturally conceives the hero a dunce, he is forced, nevertheless, to acknowledge the hero's success. Iago's sneers, therefore, at Othello are very properly followed by a confession of his importance to the state. Insensible to the Moor's nobility of character, he is aware of his utility as an instrument, and concedes the high value of his services while expressing contempt for his qualities. Knowing "the state cannot with safety cast him," for that "another of his fathom have they not to lead their business," Iago therefore feels obliged to "show out a flag and sign of love," notwithstanding his alleged hate ; and here again we have the natural bearing of the politic rogue towards a man of real honour. The rogue fears to be known as the enemy of such a man, and, from

envy of his success, affects to scorn his qualities; for the only direct triumph left to a bad man over his envied superiors, is to scoff at the very gifts for which he envies them.

So that, as often happens in real life, Iago's lying, intended to dupe and deceive Roderigo, is so managed as to effect his immediate purpose, and at the same time be more or less suggestive and significant of the truth.—The intimations thus derived from Iago lead us to regard the Moor, before we meet him, as one who deliberates with calmness, and therefore decides with firmness. His refusing to explain his conduct where he is not responsible is a pledge that he will not shrink from any responsibility where he truly owes it; and that, as he acts from honour and duty, so he will cheerfully abide the consequences. In his reply when Iago counsels him to elude Brabantio's pursuit,

“Not I: I must be found;
My parts, my title, and my perfect soul,
Shall manifest me rightly;”

all our anticipations are realized. Full of frankness, equanimity, and firmness, he is contented to work and wait, leaving the reasons of his conduct to appear in the issues thereof; whereas a man like Iago, on the contrary, delights in stating his reasons; will even go out of his way to state them, because it gives scope for activity and display of intellect, and so gratifies his pride of reason.

From his characteristic intrepidity and calmness the Moor, as we learn in the sequel, has come to be regarded by those who best know him as one whom “passion can-

not shake ;” and every thing about him seems to warrant this opinion. Though the subject of strong passions, he has ennobled them by subordinating them to higher principles ; for, if kept under reason, the stronger they are, the more they exalt reason. Which feature of Othello’s character is finely exemplified at his meeting with Brabantio and attendants, when, upon the prospect of a fight between the parties, he quiets them by exclaiming in a sort of playful earnestness, “keep up your bright swords, for the dew will rust them ;” and replies to Brabantio’s, “Down with him, thief !” “Good Signior, you shall more command with years than with your weapons.” The same thing appears again, when, after Brabantio has discharged a volley of threats and accusations, the Moor coolly and gently answers, “Where will you that I go to answer this your charge ?” thus showing that he fully appreciates the old man’s cause of anger, and craves an early opportunity to satisfy him. Though he has in no sort wronged Brabantio, he knows very well that he seems to have done so ; his feelings therefore immediately take the old man’s part, and he respects his age and condition too much to resent his violence ; hears his charges with a sort of reverent, submissive defiance, and answers them as knowing them false, yet sensible of their reasonableness, and honouring him the more for making them.

In this manner our sturdy warrior uniformly deports himself. A true hero, he is of course softened into a lamb or roughened into a lion, according as he hears the voice of duty or of danger. Firm, collected, self-balanced, no upstart exigency disconcerts him, no obloquy exasperates him to violence or recrimination. Peril,

perplexity, provocation rather augment than impair his self-possession ; and the more deeply he is stirred, the more calmly and steadily does he act. Such is the man of deep strong passions so perfectly at one among themselves that they cannot be surprised into a tumult of conflicting currents ; passions restrained on all sides alike, and therefore only deepened and strengthened by restraint ; as fire in a furnace is made the more intense by confinement, and begins to die out as soon as set free and left to its own will. This "calmness of intensity" is most finely displayed in the Moor's address to the Senate, wherein every word, though it falls on the ear and the heart as softly and sweetly as an evening breeze, seems winged with the central fires of his soul, is charged with life from every faculty and feeling of his nature. All is grace and modesty and gentleness, yet what might and majesty is there ! the union of perfect repose with the most impassioned energy.

Perhaps the finest point of contrast between Othello and Iago lies in the method of their intellectual operations. A comparison of the Moor's speech with Iago's habitual style of discourse will unfold the whole difference of their characters. Iago's mind is morbidly introversive and self-explicative ; is ever busy spinning out its own loathsome contents : he deals not in objects, but in his diseased notions and deductions, or rather, distortions of them ; takes no pleasure in viewing or showing things until he has filled them with himself, until he has baptized them in his own spirit, and he seems inwardly chuckling as he holds them up reeking with the slime he has dipped them in. Every thing about Othello's mind, on the contrary, is direct, healthy,

objective ; with the openness and docility of childhood he loses himself in external things ; his thoughts are occupied with objects, not with themselves ; and he reproduces in smooth transparent diction the truth as revealed to him from without : his mind, in short, is like a clear even mirror which, invisible itself, renders back in its exact shape and colour whatever stands before it ; so that we get from him not so much his impressions of things as the things themselves that impress him.

I know of nothing in Shakspeare wherein this quality is more beautifully conspicuous than in the Moor's account,

“How he did thrive in this fair lady's love,
And she in his.”

The dark man eloquent literally speaks in pictures and so describes things that we may almost say he transcribes them into his expressions. We see the silent blushing maiden moving about her household tasks, ever and anon averting her eye upon the earnest warrior ; leaving the door open behind her as she goes out of the room, that she may catch the tones of his voice ; hastening to resume her place by her father's side, as though drawn to the spot by some strange inspiration of filial attachment ; afraid to look the speaker in the face, yet unable to keep out of his presence ; with down-cast eye, not seeming to notice him, but drinking in with ear and heart every word of his wondrous tale : the Moor, meanwhile, waxing more eloquent when this modest listener was by, partly because he saw she was interested, and partly because he wished to interest her still more. And yet we believe every thing Othello

says ; for the virtual presence of the things he describes enables us, as it were, to test the fidelity of his representation.

In his simplicity, however, the Moor lets out a truth of which he seems not to have been aware. At Brabantio's fireside so intent was he on what took place around him as to be unconscious of what transpired within him. His quick perception of the interest he had awakened in the lady is a confession of the interest he already took in her. For he would hardly have seen so much had he been indifferent or unconcerned, but was too much delighted with what he saw, to think what made him see it. Thus the state of his mind comes out in his anxiety to know the state of hers. He has been unwittingly making love by his manner before he was even conscious of loving ; and thought he was but listening for a disclosure of her feelings, while he was really soliciting a response to his own. In a word, it was his passion that interpreted her conduct ; "the wish was father to the thought ;" though without his knowing or suspecting it to be so. He hits the heart of the matter when he says ;

"She loved me for the dangers I had passed ;
And I loved her that she did pity them :"

yet even here he shows that he has construed her emotions of pity into tokens of love, while it was his previous love that made him catch and treasure up her expressions of pity.

Herein is evinced the depth and purity of Othello's passion, that his thoughts are so engrossed with the ob-

ject as to preclude all thought of himself; and that he even hears not his own silent requests and confessions from solicitude to catch the lady's answer. Accordingly, it is an old remark, and I hope none the worse for being old, that people when truly falling in love are never aware of the fact; so that if one be aware of the fact, it is a shrewd proof that he is not falling in love. For love, like regeneration, (Southey somewhere calls love a sort of regeneration), always begins or ought to begin at depths where consciousness cannot penetrate: it is a matter wherein heart calls and answers to heart without giving the head any notice of its proceedings; so that the true lover knows not when he became one, and learns that he is one only by the fruit of chaste regards, and honourable wishes, and self-denying acts. Nothing, therefore, can be more exquisitely natural than that the Moor should honestly think he was but returning the lady's passion, while it was his own passion that caused him to see or suspect she had any for him to return. And the lady seems to have construed his efforts to interest her into a confession of the interest he already took in her; whereupon, appreciating the delicacy that kept him from speaking, she gave him a hint of encouragement to speak.

With the Moor, however, reverence keeps pace with affection. Modest and fearful, as knowing his disadvantages of person and origin, he dare not presume on the gentle lady's favour, and involuntarily seeks some tacit assurance of a return of his passion as a sort of permission to cherish and confess it. The object that attracts at the same time awes and subdues him. Irresistibly drawn towards the lady, still he dare not ap-

proach her, for she is consecrated in his eye by the very feeling that draws him. Thus, with the instinct of a most delicate nature he almost feels it a sin to love her, and fears lest the avowal and even the indulgence of his passion may imply some desecration of her. It is this feeling that originates the delicate reverential courtesy, the ardent, yet distant, and therefore beautiful regards with which a truly honourable mind instinctively attires itself towards its best object;—a feeling that throws a majestic grace around the most unpromising figure, and puts an eloquent fascination into the plainest features. Othello and Desdemona are emphatically sacred things to each other; their feeling is more of a religious than a gregarious nature; prompts them rather to worship than to caress one another; and it is difficult to say whether his nobleness be more awful to her, or her gentleness more awful to him. Of course, therefore, their manners are severely chaste and dignified, savoring not at all of that frivolous familiarity which, beginning in selfishness, generally ends in aversion; and assuredly their love is all the purer and nobler inasmuch as it prompts them to treat each other more as divinities than as lapdogs.

The alleged unfitness of Othello's match has been a theme of much edifying remark among certain sticklers for dramatic decorum; and in some cases all the stupendous beauties of the play have not been enough to redeem it from this one potent drawback. I cannot help thinking the match to be every way as fit as is sometimes thought the reverse. With submission, the noble Moor and his sweet lady have the very sort of resemblance that people thus united ought to have; and

their likeness is all the better for its co-existence with so much of unlikeness. Both are ennobled and exalted by their mutual passion; all the finest issues of two most refined natures are disclosed in their reciprocal attachment. It tells us much of their inward correspondence which could not be told so well but for their outward diversity, and eloquently reveals the beautiful correlation of courage and gentleness, both equally impotent against each other, and equally invincible against every thing else. It reminds us of what we are too apt to forget, that the stern, stout, valiant soul is the chosen home of reverence and tenderness, and that manly bravery never looks so brave as when kneeling to virgin innocence, like the lion at the feet of Una, in an attitude of worship, not of servility. Our heroic warrior's dark rough exterior is found to enclose a heart strong as a giant's, yet soft and sweet as infancy. There can be no richer display of manhood than when the neck and knee which peril but stiffens and strengthens, become weak and pliant as the sinews of a new-born babe at sight of one unarmed with aught save gentleness. It proclaims that beauty is an overmatch for strength; that true delicacy is among the highest forms of power; and that the heart which most scorns danger and suffering will soonest quail before innocence.

Equally beautiful is the fact, that Desdemona has the eye and the heart to recognize the proper complement of herself beneath such an unprepossessing appearance. Perhaps none but so pure and gentle a being could have discerned the real gentleness of the Moor through so many obscurations. To one less delicate Othello might have seemed gross, and his attraction, if he had any for

her, might have been the attraction of grossness. Iago seems aware of this when, snatching the word out of Othello's mouth, he wrings an argument of her impurity out of what is really the strongest evidence of the reverse. To her fine sense that tale of "wild adventures and mischances" which "often did beguile her of her tears,"—a tale wherein another might have seen but the marks of a rude, coarse, animal strength,—to her fine sense that tale did but reveal the history of a most meek, brave, manly soul. "Methinks this tale would win my daughter too;" and so it would, were she worthy to be won by it. Nobly blind to every thing repulsive, but keenly alive to whatever is pure and good, the lady "sees Othello's visage in his mind;" his ungracious aspect is lost to her in his graces of character; the exterior form and semblance of the man takes its shape and colour from the indwelling spirit through which she views it; and the shrine which were else so ugly to look upon is made beautiful by the life with which her chaste eye sees it irradiated. In a word, her love for the Moor was but the instinct of female delicacy for its appropriate supplement of manly energy;

"And to his honours, and his valiant parts,
Did she her soul and fortunes consecrate."

Much has been said, one where and another, about the instinctive dependence of female weakness on the strength and courage of the other sex; as though woman, in her involuntary admiration of heroism, were impelled and guided not so much by the love of excellence as by the logic of selfishness. In some such way as this do those who have more pride of intellect than

intellect to be proud of, often seek to indemnify their conscious want of nobler qualities. Happily the instincts of womanhood are too strong for the vain babblings of this self-idolizing intellectuality. So long as God and nature have the making and teaching of woman, there is little danger that bravery will have to succumb to the rhetoric and sophistry of philosophic dunces. Woman's natural preference of heroic qualities is right; infinitely better than all the logic of a canting, conceited philanthropy: it is among the best signs we have, by as much as a thirst for glory is better than a thirst for gain, that her thoughts and affections are not altogether of the earth, earthy; and woe befall us when she shall so far degenerate as to choose him who goes out into the market to wriggle and rust for money, rather than him who goes out into the field to fight for honour.

“When I have borne in memory what has tamed
Great nations, how ennobling thoughts depart
When men change swords for ledgers, and desert
The student's bower for gold, some fears unnamed
I had, my country! am I to be blamed?”

We are told, “man shall not live by bread alone.” Some there are, however, who seem to require nothing but bread to live on; that is, they seem to have no life, no hunger but what bread is every way sufficient for. But then there are other some who cannot live on bread alone; who are even worse than dead unless they be in conjunction and communion with something pure and noble and divine. Of this latter sort, I take it, are Othello and Desdemona; and that something so neces-

sary to cherish and support the life of their life they find in each other. The attachment on both sides springs simply from the instinct of a pure mind for what is best and noblest in itself. This it is that beautifies and sanctifies their union; that makes it, in the words of Jeremy Taylor, "a conjunction of the whole life and the noblest of friendships." They come together on a footing of interdependence indeed, but it is an interdependence of honour, not of interest;—an interdependence wherein the lady gives support to the being that protects her; partakes of his glory, and enhances it by the participation; shines by reflecting his light, yet doubles it by the reflection. For a woman's appropriate honour is the honour she derives from her husband, and a man's appropriate honour is the honour he imparts to his wife; and he stands as much in need of one to whom he may give it, as she does of one from whom she may receive it; and he is as dependent on her for a reflection of his light, as she is on him for an emission of it: for, though he cannot help giving it out if it be in him, still he enjoys not its brightness unless it be thrown back to him from another, thus at the same time revealing itself and the object on whom it falls. Such, I confess, has always been to me the true nature of the match in question;—a partnership, not of utility or of interest, but purely of honour; the chaste, beautiful wedlock of meekness and magnanimity: and when we see them together in the light of this their true relationship, we feel inclined to ask ourselves with a mixture of regret and admiration,

"Were ever spirits could descend
So graciously, each other's need to suit?"

I have been so used to reading and hearing about the jealous Moor, and about this play as illustrating the struggle between love and jealousy, that for a good while I scarcely dared to think otherwise, much less, to say what I thought. Half the pleasure of the work was for a long time lost to me by the strife thus engendered between my head and heart; the conviction that I ought to censure what I could not choose but approve. As often as I return to the play I get more and more satisfied, that what the heart finds in it is a far better guide to its contents than any pre-convictions derived from the critics; and that criticisms on such a subject are valuable so far only as they help translate our feelings into conscious thought.

Coleridge boldly says, "Othello does not kill Desdemona in jealousy, but in a conviction forced upon him by the almost superhuman art of Iago; such a conviction as any man would and must have entertained, who had believed Iago's honesty and ability as Othello did." Which position is endorsed by the author of the Critical Notice appended to this play in Knight's edition of Shakspeare. With such authority before me I trust I shall not seem presumptuous in taking the same view. The common opinion on this point is probably owing, in part, to the remarks of other characters, to whom Othello must perforce seem jealous, because they know and can know nothing of the devilish practice to which he has been subjected. And this opinion has doubtless been much furthered by the stage, where Iago's villany has generally been represented as so open and barefaced, that the Moor must have been grossly stupid or grossly jealous not to see through him; whereas, in reality, so

subtle is Iago's craft, so close and involved are his designs, so "sugared o'er" with plausibility and seeming earnestness, that we cannot help respecting and honouring Othello the more for being taken in by him. Such is but a specimen of the *improvements* which Shakspeare's characters have suffered and still suffer, in order to fit them for theatrical popularity.

It is worthy of remark, that Desdemona cannot be persuaded her husband is jealous. Even after she has been crushed down by the blows of his tongue something within assures her, that what she has found in him and loves him for is incompatible with any such conception as is attributed to him. Emilia, it is true, at once suspects him of jealousy; she is a person of the right stamp to conceive such a suspicion; but then she is probably as much more ignorant of him than Desdemona as she is more inclined to suspect him. To offset Desdemona's conviction, I know it may be urged, that love is naturally blind to the character of its object. Nevertheless, I cannot help thinking that the impression of such a woman respecting the man whom she loves may be safely taken against the judgment of any or of all who love him not. It is true, and I hope always will be true, that women are not very good reasoners, their heads being generally merged, at least up to the ears, in their hearts; but a right-minded woman's love involves more of reason, in the best sense of the term, than all our reasoning does.

Jealousy is well described in this play as "a monster that doth make the meat it feeds on;" and this description sufficiently acquits Othello of having any aptitude for it. For Othello's state of mind is forced on him from

without ; is the result of external evidence which, however false, scarce any confidence could resist. It is therefore the reverse of true jealousy, which is essentially a self-generated passion ; springs altogether out of itself and stands altogether on itself ;—a state of mind in which perception is smothered in surmise, and the subject sees nothing but the unreality which he fears. Springing up of its own accord and craving some external support, this passion naturally resorts, as with Ford in *Merry Wives of Windsor*, to cunning and stratagem, first to tempt, then to detect its object. Tortured with the apprehension of something wrong, the jealous man seeks relief in assuming the truth of what he apprehends. As jealousy proceeds without reason, so of course no reason can silence or overcome it. It is like the jaundiced eye, which discolours every thing it looks upon ; so that whatever colour things may have, still they become yellow the moment it sees them ; and the more we try to convince it that some things are white, the more it gets convinced that none are so. Emilia shows that she understands whence and what jealousy is. When Desdemona, utterly unable to suspect even that she is suspected, acquits the Moor of jealousy on the ground that she has never given him cause, Emilia replies :—

“ But jealous souls will not be answered so ;
They are not ever jealous for the cause,
But jealous, for they are jealous : 'tis a monster
Begot upon itself, born of itself.”

Thus jealousy implies a disease of the eye ; the vice is in the organ, not in the object, of vision. A passion

thus originating spontaneously, and rooted and grounded in self-deception, surely ought not to be confounded with a state of mind superinduced, like the Moor's, by forgery of external proofs ;—a forgery wherein he has no share whatever but as the victim.

Besides, jealousy is a mean sneaking passion, and acts and speaks as from an instinct of its meanness. Oppressed with a sense of its quality, it tries to hide itself in a wardrobe of riddles, and send the listener into himself for an interpretation of its language ; gives out dark insinuations which none but a guilty mind can well understand ; slinks off into vague hints which one can hardly take the meaning of without inculpating himself. In this way the jealous man tries to suggest what he is afraid or ashamed to express ; to impute the crime he has conceived without becoming responsible for the imputation : then, if understood, he bites with some such phrase as, “ a guilty conscience needs no accuser ;” if not understood, with some such phrase as, “ none are so blind as those that won't see.” Such is the effect of this passion on Leontes in *Winter's Tale*, who, unable to hide yet ashamed to reveal his thought, does something between the two, until forced upon the right word by his wife's inability to take his meaning, which inability he immediately construes into an artful attempt to hide her own guilt. Thus jealousy breeds confirmation out of the innocence of its object ; and, if others stand up in her defence, infers their participation in her crime. But there is indeed no such thing as refuting this passion ; it devours and digests and assimilates all opposition, turns every medicine into the disease ; so that the only way is, to let it alone till it eats up itself.

To be capable of such a passion, Othello must have lacked or lost the honour which forms the actuating principle of his conduct. It is characteristic of a man like him to put the best face upon things ; if he sees any thing wrong, to blame it as his own jealous curiosity ; and, from an instinctive dread of suspicion, to resist even proof. Iago evidently knows this ; knows that Othello is incapable of spontaneous distrust ; that he must see, before he'll doubt ; that when he doubts, he'll prove ; and that when he has proved, he will retain his honour at all events, and retain his love if it be compatible with honour. Accordingly, lest Othello should suspect himself of jealousy Iago carefully warns him against it ; puts him on his guard against such self-delusions, that his mind may be more open to the force of evidence, and lest, from fear of being jealous, he should intrench himself in the opposite extreme, and so be proof against conviction. He would have Othello sift and weigh the evidence well before he takes it, that, taking, he may trust it and act upon it ; for the villain knows very well, that one naturally confides in the results of an investigation according to the severity with which it has been conducted.

The doubts which Iago's vague insinuations first awaken in the Moor have reference only to Cassio.

“OTHELLO. Is he not honest ?

IAGO. Honest, my lord ?

OTHELLO. Ay, honest.

IAGO. My lord, for aught I know.”

Not a breath of suspicion here touching the lady ; and Iago seems perplexed that the Moor's doubts have lighted

elsewhere than he had intended. But, finding him bent on going the wrong track, Iago continues,

“ For Michael Cassio,—
I dare be sworn, I think that he is honest.”

And yet all this follows hard upon Desdemona's first solicitation for Cassio, which, one would think, were enough to make the Moor jealous, were he prone to jealousy ; but at the close of which he exclaims as the lady retires ;

“ Excellent wretch ! Perdition catch my soul,
But I do love thee : and when I love thee not,
Chaos is come again ;”

thus showing that the very warmth of her solicitation had but enhanced his confidence and admiration. And afterwards, when he is groaning beneath Iago's machinations, the sight of her restores him :—

“ If she be false, O, then heaven mocks itself !—
I'll not believe it ;”—

and as often as he meets her his convictions, deep and well-grounded as they are, are shaken by the very looks which, were he jealous, would but confirm his jealousy.

The struggle, then, in Othello's mind is not between love and jealousy, but between love and honour ; and all Iago's proceedings are precisely adapted to bring these latter two passions into collision. Indeed it is the Moor's very freedom from a jealous temper that subjects him to the villain's machinations. Such a char-

acter as his, so open, so generous, so confiding, is just the one to fall into the strong toils of Iago's cunning; to have escaped them, would have argued him a partaker of the strategy and sagacity to which he falls a victim. Honour of course prompts and requires us to rely on another's word, unless we have proof to the contrary; to presume that things and persons are what they seem: and it is an impeachment of our own veracity, to suspect falsehood in one who bears a character for truth. Such is precisely the Moor's condition in respect of Iago; a man whom he has long known, but never caught in a lie; whom he has often trusted, and never had occasion to regret it. The truth is, in our judgment of Othello we ought to proceed as if the lady were really guilty of what she is charged with; for, were she ever so guilty, he could hardly have stronger proof than he has; and that the evidence owes all its force to the plotting and perjury of another, surely makes nothing against the Moor.

Touching, then, the question of jealousy, critics, it seems to me, have altogether mistaken their man. Iago, I take it, is the jealous character; all the jealousy in the play seems concentrated in him. He has a twofold jealousy both of Othello and of Cassio—a private, domestic jealousy, and a public, official jealousy. In his soliloquies, indeed, he confesses himself jealous, now of Othello now of Cassio, according as he wants a pretext to salve his conscience or nerve his faculties for the infernal plots he has in hand against them.—In one sense, however, the Moor undoubtedly is jealous; he is jealous of his honour, as he ought to be, and as every honourable man must be;—a jealousy which has nothing

selfish or revengeful about it, and which prompts him, not indeed to sacrifice others to himself, but to sacrifice both himself and others, if need be, to truth and justice.

Accordingly, in the killing of Desdemona we have all the marks that distinguish a judicial from a revengeful act. The Moor goes about her death calmly and religiously, as a duty from which he would gladly escape by his own death if he could ; and we feel that his heart is wrung with unspeakable relentings, though his hand is firm. It is a part of his heroism, that, as he prefers her to himself, so he prefers honour to her ; and he regards himself as a victim to the necessity of administering the severest retribution where he bears the deepest love. This is evident in their last interview where she says •

“ I never did
Offend you in my life ; never loved Cassio,
But with such general warranty of heaven
As I might love : I never gave him token ;”

and he replies :—

“ By heaven, I saw my handkerchief in his hand.
O perjured woman ! thou dost stone my heart,
And makest me call what I intend to do
A murder, which I thought a sacrifice.”

Here he obviously contemplates her death as an act of religion not of revenge ; as a sacrifice due to the institution which he fully believes and has reason to believe she has mocked and profaned ; and he fears lest her perjury, of which he seems to have the most convincing proofs, may surprise and betray him into anger, and so corrupt the deed from an act of religion into an act of

revenge, from a sacrifice into a murder. "Anger and revenge," as hath been said, "seize his mind but transiently; they spring up and pass away with the first burst of passion; are, indeed, but the momentary phases under which love and honour, the ruling principles of his soul, evince the deep wounds they are suffering."

There is nothing in Shakspeare more deeply pathetic than Othello's state of mind after the fatal conviction is fastened upon him. His whole life and being now seem absorbed in sorrow, as they have hitherto been in love and honour.

"Had it pleased heaven
To try me with affliction; had he rained
All kinds of sores, and shames, on my bare head;
Steeped me in poverty to the very lips;
Given to captivity me and my utmost hopes;
I should have found in some part of my soul
A drop of patience: but, alas! to make me
A fixed figure, for the time of scorn
To point his slow unmoving finger at—
Yet could I bear that too; well, very well."

But a deeper, darker, direfuller woe than this has overtaken him; a wound which no prescription can heal, a stain that eats like rust into the soul; an insult, a mockery, an outrage, where patience becomes a shame, forgiveness a sin;

"Such an act,
That blurs the grace and blush of modesty;
Makes marriage vows as false as dicer's oaths;
And sweet religion makes a rhapsody
Of words."

The belief that she, in whom he had built his faith, and

“garnered up his heart,” his crown of rejoicing, his other, better, dearer self, has become the grave of his honour, that life of his life ; that she, in whom he looked to find how much more blessed it is to give than to receive, has desecrated all his gifts and turned his very religion into sacrilege ;—in this conviction all the poetry of life, the grace, the sacrament, the consecration, every thing that can gladden or glorify existence is gone ; his whole being, with its entire freight of hopes, honours, affections, is reduced to a total wreck ; a long last farewell to whatever has made life attractive, the conditions, motives, prospects of noble achievement, is all there is left to him : in a word, he feels that he is literally unmade ; lost even to himself ; robbed, not only of the laurels he has won, but even of the spirit, the manhood, that made him brave to do and suffer in winning them ; so that he can neither live nobly, nor nobly die, but is doomed to a sort of living death, an object of scorn, of loathing, of abhorrence unto himself. In this condition no wonder that his spirit reels, and totters, and clings convulsively to the only thing that now remains to him, his honour, until in his efforts to rescue this he loses all, and has no refuge but in self-destruction. He approaches the awful duty in the bitterness as well as the calmness of despair. In sacrificing his love to save his honour he really performs the most heroic self-sacrifice ; for the taking of her life involves something more than the loss of his own. Indeed, he never could have loved the lady so much, had he not loved honour more. Her love for him, too, is based upon the very principle that now prompts and nerves him to the sacrifice. She never would have loved him, had he been of a mind to

visit with less severity such a wrong as he is convinced she has done him. Assuredly, he is the more to be pitied of the two ; and as at last our pity for her rises into awe, so our awe of him melts into pity, the catastrophe thus blending their several virtues and sufferings into one most profound, solemn, sweetly-mournful impression.

DESDEMONA.

A LADY living more than a thousand miles from where this was written,—who, while a stranger in a strange land, was a sort of guardian angel to me,—something between a mother and a sister, engaging a part of the feeling due them both, but not quite all the feeling due to either,—whose words instructed me much, but the daily beauty of whose life instructed me far more, and abides with me as I go out and as I come in, now that her words are mostly forgotten ;—this lady once read to me from a New England periodical a very brilliant and glowing description of One whose Name I must not mention here. After finishing the reading, she remarked that the description was among the most beautiful she had ever read, but that it was replete with the spirit of infidelity ; that no one who had any right knowledge of the Subject would have dared thus to describe Him ; that, in short, the very brilliancy of the description disclosed a state of mind, if not of heart, where no religion was. It took me several years to appreciate the wisdom of this remark, and I do not presume that I fully appreciate it yet. The truth is, there are some things about which fluency and opulence of speech serve only

to betray our ignorance : the best proof of our understanding them is, that we do not, nay dare not attempt to describe them ; and our safest eloquence concerning them is that modest silence wherein we “ confess without confession ” that they are richer than our tongues.

Reflections not unlike these have often crossed my mind in what I have had to do with some of Shakspeare's women. To none of them were such reflections more appropriate than to the heroine of the play under consideration.—Much of what I have to say upon Desdemona has been anticipated in connection with my remarks on Othello. One had almost need go through a season of special discipline before he were fit to think and speak of her by herself. Meek, uncomplaining, submissive even unto death where she owes allegiance, her character is not of the sort to take with a self-teaching, self-obeying generation ; and I know not whether there be more of sacrilege in presuming to scrutinize her for myself, or in holding her up for the scrutiny of others. The beauty of the woman is so hid in the obedience and affection of the wife, that it almost seems a profanation to praise it. As brave to suffer wrong as she is fearful to do it, there is a holiness in her mute resignation which we children of disobedience are scarcely worthy to look upon, and which ought, perhaps, to be kept, where Shakspeare has left it, veiled from all save those whom a severe discipline of humanity may have qualified for duly revering it.

Desdemona is not more interesting in herself than several of Shakspeare's women ; but none of the rest is in a condition so proper to develope what was once esteemed the highest virtue of which woman, or rather,

of which human nature is capable. Unfortunately, however, the peculiar wisdom of the present age has well nigh formed a cataract over the eye to which such virtues are addressed: we have reached an elevation where it were almost a sin to cast such jewels before us; —an elevation which seems likely to make us giddy and vertiginous, until we shall fall to a lower place than any we have risen from. It were a curious inquiry, where Shakspeare found the elements and exemplars of such creations as Desdemona; but the inquiry might prove so humbling to modern pride, that it would not be for my interest to prosecute it in the lecture-room. Of this, however, we may be assured, that if he did not find those elements and exemplars in the world around him, then his genius must have dwelt much nearer heaven than his most enthusiastic admirers have ever dreamed!

Unfortunately for her reputation with the savans of the age, Desdemona does not approve herself a champion of woman's rights: she has therefore been censured and even sneered at in certain quarters, as lacking spirit and independence and force of character.

“ Mightier far

Than strength of nerve and sinew, or the sway
Of magic potent over sun and star,
Is love, though oft to agony distrest,
And though its favourite seat be feeble woman's breast:”

Swayed by this power, she is of course “a child to chiding,” and sinks beneath unkindness, instead of having the firmness to outface or resent it. Her rights as a woman seem quite worthless to her, unless given and

guaranteed by another ; to be under the necessity of asserting them, is to have lost, and more than lost them forever. A constrained abstinence from evil deeds and unkind words has no charms for her ; it is on the spontaneous charities and generousities of the heart, that she must live or have no life ; and to be sheltered from the wind and storm, is nothing, is even worse than nothing, unless she have a living fountain of light and warmth in the being that shelters her : in a word, she is so formed that she cannot thrive, cannot even live under regulations, like those our philanthropists are aiming at, so finely adjusted as to supersede religious ties ; and therefore she does not stand very well with those who have found religion, in all her existing forms, the greatest clog, perhaps, that now obstructs the wheels of reform.

We have been taught that the husband is to obey the wife as much as the wife the husband ; and our next lesson probably will be, that the parent is to obey the child as much as the child the parent. O, divine science of equality ! Chivalry, the first and fairest daughter of religion, has long since been gibbeted, and the puerility of the tournament has given place to the virility of the horse-race ! Woman is to be raised above the awful prerogative of defencelessness ; legislation, having gone sick with a kind of atheistic philanthropy, is stepping in to rescue her from her old dependence on the religion of the other sex ; and as she is losing her motives to appeal to this principle, so of course this principle is losing its motives to speak and act in her behalf. Saint Peter, by the way, was a very strange logician ; not half so wise, probably, as the sophists of our day : but then we should remember that Saint Peter had not the

advantages of modern illumination! Writing to the churches, he enjoins on the men that they should *give honour unto the wife as being the weaker vessel*; thus assigning her supposed inferiority as the reason why she should have especial honour. Accordingly, our fathers were so stupid or benighted as to think, that even because woman is comparatively helpless and defenceless, therefore none but a brute, or a coward, or a ruffian, would dare to harm her. So that in their view the very defencelessness of woman was a wall of brass about her; but this was because they had not shaken off that absurd superstition sometimes called a soul. Happily all such notions have now passed or are passing away; and it is even thought by some that marriage, like the State and the Church, is rather too old an institution to survive our present paroxysm of improvement. As a further development of this noble system, strange its advocates do not propose to get up a new edition of woman with beards and bass voices! Weighed in the balance of this sublime philosophy, Desdemona has of course been found wanting in the qualities that make up the idea of female heroism.

But seriously: In an age when freedom and dignity are sought for in insubordination, and all obedience, save to ourselves, is not only thought, but, far worse, is even felt to be a sort of degradation: when wisdom (queer wisdom), inculcating an identity of rights and duties between the sexes, is giving us mannish women and effeminate men, forgetting that the more the sexes resemble, the less they will love and respect one another: when woman, instead of quietly doing her duties to secure her rights, is going about to secure her rights, that

she may be in a condition to do her duties, and of course finds the former so long a labour that she can never come to the latter: when, reversing the doctrine and practice of our fathers, that married people “must be complicated in affections and interest, that there be no distinction between them of mine and thine;” and that “their goods should be as their children, not to be divided, but of one possession and provision,” for that “whatsoever is otherwise is not marriage, but merchandise;”—when, reversing all this, marriage is passing from a conjunction of aims and interests into a conflict and competition thereof, and the old-fashioned way of regarding man and wife as one person, and so legislating *round* them, is getting reformed into a method of legislating *between* them; so that the wife, instead of seeking protection *in* her husband, in the religious awe with which, by a meek, gentle, submissive demeanor, she used in simpler times to inspire him, is resorting to legal provisions and securities for protection *against* him: when a heartless system of domestic equality and independence is crushing all the higher domestic sentiments, killing off old honour and loyalty and gentleness and generosity, by leaving them nothing to do, nor any occasion for their exercise;—pumping out all the spontaneous chivalry of our nature, and leaving us no manhood for woman to trust, nor any womanhood for man to fear: when a sort of malignant, ferocious philanthropy, sprung from the marriage of ambition and infidelity, is going about to strip off the sacred wardrobe which religion has gathered about our otherwise naked, shivering, defenceless nature, to supply its place with court-house logic and paper constitutions,—until the great sacrament

and bond of society, the consecrated channel through which all social grace must come to us, or else not come at all, has got well nigh desiccated into a soulless, godless, impotent and impudent legality :—in such an age it is surely far from strange, that the possession of lofty heroic qualities should have been denied to her

“ Whose life was, like the violet, sweet,
As climbing jasmine, pure ;”

and who was guilty of no more heroism in respect of her husband than is implied in, “ though he slay me, yet will I trust in him ;” or, in her own words,

“ Unkindness may do much ;
And his unkindness may defeat my life,
But never taint my love ”

Well might Wordsworth say,

“ The homely beauty of the good old cause
Is gone, our peace, our fearful innocence,
And pure religion breathing household laws.”

Fortunately, however, notwithstanding our present surfeit of transcendental crotchets and theories, we may hope there yet survives a reversionary fund of healthy sentiment in human nature, which “ the gentle lady married to the Moor ” may fall back upon with confidence. People may wrangle and syllogize themselves into errors and follies as they will, but nature is still too strong for them, and, before this excelling pattern of wifely submission, will be pretty sure to vindicate herself in their hearts. In Desdemona’s absence they may

argue that she is wrong, but in her presence they can hardly help feeling that she is right. There is an awful eloquence, a saint-like beauty in her quiet meek-spirited resignation, which will baulk all their sophisms, put all their reasonings to shame, and make them "feel that they are wiser than they know:" and in this feeling thus inspired and enforced there lies the power to overmaster their wranglings, and regenerate them from the arrogances and absurdities into which a vain self-sufficing intellectuality hath betrayed them. To this fund of indestructible, though perhaps undeveloped sentiment, Desdemona may be safely entrusted. And if people have any fond theories from which they would not be saved, let them beware how they venture within the power of her silent appeal; when they go to her as instructors, let them carefully put armour over their eyes and ears; for there is a might in her look, a magic in her tone, which will surely awe and subdue them into worshippers: unless, peradventure, their souls have got so exhausted with transcendental air-pumps, that a guinea of truth and a feather of theory will move in them with equal rapidity.

Desdemona's character may be almost said to consist in the union of purity and impressibility. All spirit, she yet appears all sense; with her whole form perfectly ensouled, instinct with life in every part,

"The eloquent blood
Spoke in her cheek, and so distinctly wrought,
That we might almost say her body thought."

Thus every organ of her life, her entire frame seems receptive of influences and impressions from without:

drinking in at every pore the inspiration of external objects, she lives so absorbed in those objects as scarcely to admit a sense of her own existence. We have a hint of this in her father's account of her ;—

“ A maiden never bold,
Of spirit so still and quiet, that her motion
Blushed at itself ;”—

as of a being with so many influences and impressions flowing in upon her, living so entranced amid a world of beauty and delight, that betwixt awe and joy her whole soul kept evermore looking and listening ; and if at any time she chanced upon a stray thought or vision of herself, she shrunk back surprised and abashed, as if she had caught herself in the presence of a stranger whom modesty kept her from looking in the face. It is through this most delicate impressibility that she sometimes gets frightened out of her real character, as in her equivocation about the handkerchief, and her childlike pleading for life in the last scene, where her perfect candour and resignation are overmastered by impressions of immediate terror.

But with this exquisite susceptibility of external impressions, she is nevertheless susceptible only of the good. No element of impurity can insinuate itself ; her mind is closed not only against its entrance, but against the knowledge, and even the suspicion of its existence. Her whole nature seems wrought about with some subtle, mysterious texture of moral sympathies and antipathies, which always selects and appropriates whatever

is pure, without taking any thought or touch of the evil mixed with it; so that

“ Her life flows on a sacred stream,
In whose calm depth the beautiful and pure
Alone are mirrored; which, though shapes of ill
Do hover round its surface, glides in light,
And takes no shadow from them.”

Even Iago's moral oil-of-vitriol cannot eat a passage into her mind: from his envenomed wit she extracts the element of harmless mirth without receiving or even suspecting the venom with which it is charged.

Well may we say, alas, what a world is this for such a being to sojourn in! yet such, I verily believe, do sometimes stray away hither, with no security but so much of heaven as they bring with them;—an innocence which is at once defenceless and unassailable, and therefore unassailable even because it is defenceless. The world's contagions pass by Desdemona, yet dare not hurt, nor touch, nor come near her, because she has nothing within to sympathize with them, or own their acquaintance.

It may be expected that I should say something respecting Desdemona's treatment of her old kind father; but the truth is, I hardly know how to do her justice in this particular without doing injustice to something else. Implicit obedience, inviolable fidelity to parents is a law which it is indeed a fearful thing to transgress; and now, especially, when our female and juvenile democracy take such manifest pride in spurning at all domestic authority, and profanely urge their duty to God as a dispensation from the ordinary duties of life, it becomes us

to avoid even the appearance of relaxing in the least degree the sacred bonds of filial obligation. True it is,

“ In deep and awful channels runs
The sympathy of sire and sons.”

When people of a refractory and insubmissive spirit appeal from the powers that be to the Power that ordained them, we have a right to presume, that they are really but appealing to themselves, and pretending a higher duty as a license to do their own will and pleasure. Nevertheless, there are cases where this appeal may be made, and where a higher duty is to supersede a lower one ; else, wherefore are we told that we ought to obey God rather than man ? Whether this appeal be rightly made in particular cases, may be best determined, perhaps, from the general character of those who make it. None but truly obedient children can be justified in disobeying good parents, because none others can give any evidence, that in so doing they act from conscience not from self-will ; that is, that their seeming disobedience is really but a higher obedience. Otherwise, we may safely class them with the person mentioned by Dr. South, who said, “ he had indeed read the Scripture, and frequented ordinances for a long time, but never could gain any true comfort or quiet of mind till he brought himself to the persuasion, that whatsoever he had a mind to do, was the will of God that he should do.” Now Desdemona’s history is amply written in her father’s entire and absolute confidence in her, and in the obstinacy with which he persists in attributing her revolt to “ spells and medicines bought of mountebanks.” As nothing but a life of uniform obedience could have inspired him with

this confidence, so we may presume that nothing but a pure conscience would have counselled her to disobey him; and her subsequent conduct proves, that the cause of her disobedience is one for which she is willing to sacrifice her life. In a word, she deceives and deserts her father to follow one for whom she is ready, if need be, to die. Assuredly, then, it is not that she loves her father less, but that she loves Othello more; "her heart is subdued even to the very quality of her lord;" and she is doubtless justifiable in doing all for his sake that she would be in doing to save her own life. In a similar spirit, her last breath is in utterance of what, though itself untrue, is the strongest demonstration of her perfect truth. When asked who has killed her, she sighs out, "Nobody; I myself; commend me to my kind lord;"—an expression manifestly intended to shield her husband from the reproach of her death: and however causists may syllogize this untruth into a sin, no right-minded person can possibly help loving her the better for it. Her sharpest pang, next to the loss of her husband's confidence, is the bitter repentance and burning remorse which she knows will seize his spirit when he comes to know the truth.

I have thus spoken round and round this theme, as a sort of an apology for not speaking upon it. The truth is, what I inwardly know and feel respecting Desdemona, cannot, must not, shall not be uttered here, lest I should harden your hearts, and harden my own heart, by turning "the awful modesties of sorrow" into merchandise. It seems a thing which she has imparted to me in confidence; a secret between us which shall not be wrung from me; which I scarce dare utter even to myself;

which it were a betrayal of a most sacred trust to divulge; which you have a right to learn from none but herself; and which none but herself has a right to impart. I can only say, let him who would know what I have known, and feel what I have felt, respecting her, go to her for himself, but go as a pupil, not as a critic; and if he does not entirely approve her course, let him be assured that he is not competent to judge her, and that he has much to learn from her or from some one else like her, before he will be worthy to speak of her. But if, throughout her whole written history, from the first intimation of the gentle, submissive daughter, to the last groan of the ever-loving, ever-confiding, ever-obedient, broken-hearted wife, he has the gift to see that there is nought but beauty and dignity and holiness, then let him weep, weep, weep for her, or rather, weep for himself that he is not more like her; so shall he depart from her presence "a sadder and a wiser man."

Do not think, therefore, that I would be caught defending her meek, patient, unresisting submissiveness. Let no man dare to defend it! An angel from heaven were scarcely worthy to defend it; or, if worthy to do it, assuredly he would not do it! Indeed, indeed, you do the gentle lady a great wrong, but do yourselves a far greater wrong, if you suppose for a moment that she would not shrink from disobedience as an unspeakable degradation,—a thing as much worse than she suffers as she suffers worse than she deserves; or that she would not rather die by her husband's hand than to owe her life to any protection against him. What, indeed, were life, what could it be to her, since suspicion has fallen on her innocence? Before her death she has received

a wound in her spirit from which death is but a relief. That her husband could not, would not, *dare* not wrong her, even because she has trusted in him, and because in her holy, awful defencelessness she could not and would not resist or resent the wrong;—this is the only protection which were any thing but a crucifixion to her, and from which she would not pray on her bended knees to be delivered.

THE END.









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